THE saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE
35c

ICD

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

His Heart Could Break
by Craig Rice

The Sound of Murder
by William P. McGivern

Under Sentence of Death
by Edgar Wallace

Night of Witchcraft
by Rafael Sabatini

The Harrington Case
by Thomas Walsh

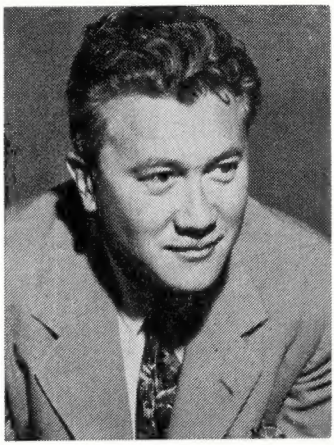
THE WATER MERCHANT

A NEW SAINT STORY by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING SIZE PUBLICATION

NIGH ON SEVEN YEARS AGO, the London *Daily Worker,* taking umbrage at a Conservative speechmaker who was quoted as saying that "In general, life grows more civilized in Russia, and there is an increasingly successful emphasis on 'cultural' conduct... and what we should describe as middle-class behavior," burst into satiric verse in part as follows:



All things bright and beautiful,
  All virtues small and great,
Come from the middle classes,
  Good manners incarnate....
When Russian parents banish
  Their kids to boarding school
To learn, by being beaten,
  The arts of bourgeois rule...
Their fathers give up reading
  The classics as "too brainy"
And civilize their minds with
  The Saint and Peter Cheyney....

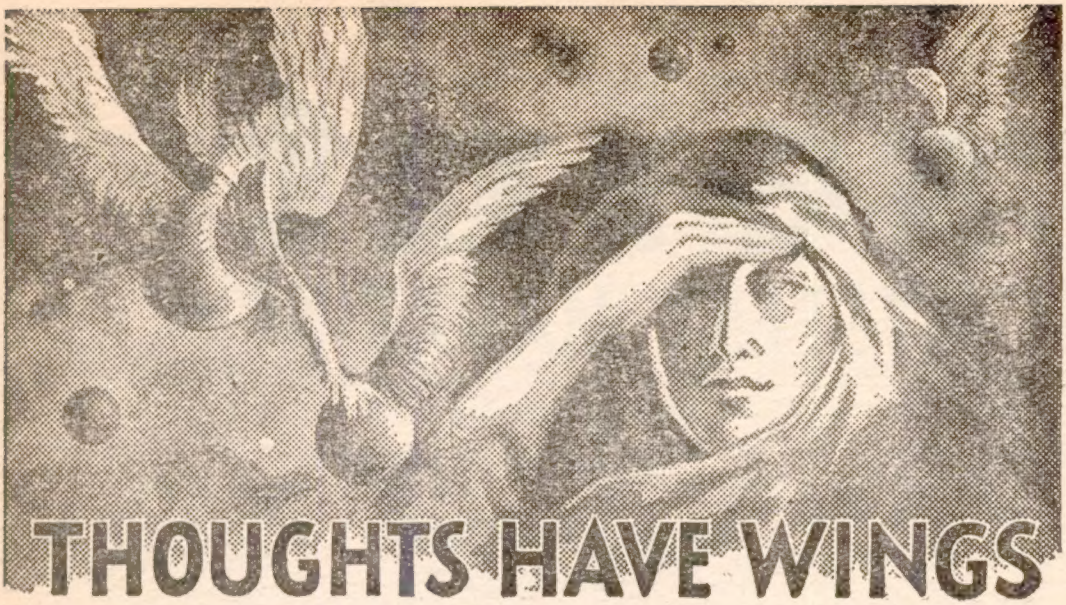
I have privately cherished this gem of poesy ever since, deeming it no light accolade to be picked on by such an authoritative publication as a symbol of bourgeois culture. But this is the first chance I have had to bring it before a wider audience.

I was reminded of it when reading over my contribution to this issue, THE WATER MERCHANT, which opens with some seemingly irrelevant reflections of the Saint in which any good Commie will recognize the taint of unregenerate imperialism. I am hoping that some Comrade will show this to the *Daily Worker,* and that their muse will be inspired to another eulogy which I can reprint here.

Meanwhile, I hope we shall not swing Tito back to the side of Khrushchev again by including William P. McGivern's Jugoslav excursion THE SOUND OF MURDER in this same issue. Perhaps Rafael Sabatini's true tale of aristocratic shenanigans, NIGHT OF WITCHCRAFT, will make them both feel better. Otherwise, I fear that our other featured writers — Edgar Wallace, Craig Rice, and Thomas Walsh—are all smirched with evidences of bourgeois culture.

See you in Outer Mongolia.

Cleve Cheslin



THOUGHTS HAVE WINGS

You Can Influence Others With Your Thinking!

TRY it some time. Concentrate intently upon another person seated in a room with you, without his noticing it. Observe him gradually become restless and finally turn and look in your direction. Simple—yet it is a *positive demonstration* that thought generates a mental energy which can be projected from your mind to the consciousness of another. Do you realize how much of your success and happiness in life depend upon your influencing others? Is it not important to you to have others understand your point of view—to be receptive to your proposals?

Demonstrable Facts

How many times have you wished there were some way you could impress another favorably—*get across to him or her your ideas?* That thoughts can be transmitted, received, and understood by others is now scientifically demonstrable. The tales of miraculous accomplishments of mind by the ancients are now known to be fact—not fable. The method whereby these things can be *intentionally*, not accidentally, accomplished has been a secret long cherished by the Rosicrucians—one of the schools of ancient wisdom existing throughout the world. To thousands everywhere, for centuries, the Rosicrucians have privately taught this nearly-lost art of the practical use of mind power.

This *Free* Book Points Out the Way

The Rosicrucians (not a religious organization) invite you to explore the powers of your mind. Their sensible, simple suggestions have caused intelligent men and women to soar to new heights of accomplishment. *They will show you how* to use your natural forces and talents to do things you now think are beyond your ability. Send for a copy of the fascinating sealed *free* book, "The Mastery of Life," which explains how you may receive this unique wisdom and benefit by its application to your daily affairs. Address your request to: Scribe: E.M.S.

The Rosicrucians
(AMORC)
SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.

THE ® saint MYSTERY MAGAZINE

JUNE 1959
VOL. 11, NO. 6

The Water Merchant 4
by LESLIE CHARTERIS

His Heart Could Break 23
by CRAIG RICE

Second Spring 42
by THEODORE MATHIESON

The Murder of Scented Flower 57
by WENZELL BROWN

The Sound of Murder 62
by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Under Sentence of Death 72
by EDGAR WALLACE

The Harrington Case 82
by THOMAS WALSH

The Saint's Ratings 103
A MONTHLY FEATURE

Time for Crime 104
by WALT SHELDON

Night of Witchcraft 113
by RAFAEL SABATINI

H. L. Herbert
Publisher

Hans Stefan Santesson
Editorial Director

Leslie Charteris
Supervising Editor

THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 11, No. 6. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 320 Fifth Ave., New York 1, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y. Characters in this magazine are entirely fictitious, and have no relation to any persons living or dead. © 1959, by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. June, 1959.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

HAVE YOU BEEN ABLE TO GET YOUR COPY OF THE saint EACH MONTH?

THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE gives you the most thrilling collection of mystery-detective fiction ever made available in a SINGLE MAGAZINE.

In each issue of THE SAINT, you meet internationally famous writers whose published novels would cost you from $2.75 to $3.95 each.

You can look forward to a COMPLETE MYSTERY each month by LESLIE CHARTERIS—creator of THE SAINT, one of the most popular characters in fiction today—PLUS exciting stories by outstanding authors, such as, John Dickson Carr, Agatha Christie, Sax Rohmer, Van Wyck Mason, Craig Rice, Philip Wylie, Octavus Roy Cohen and many others.

We should like very much to add your name to the list of the many thousands of mystery-loving subscribers from New York to Sydney, from Paris to the ports of Mars who in recent years have become THE SAINT'S avowed partisans.

If you are having trouble finding THE SAINT on your newsstand, and you want to be sure of getting us regularly . . . just clip the coupon below and mail it to us—with your check or money order—and THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE will arrive on time each month.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, New York

Kindly enter my subscription for THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE
One year (12 issues) at $3.75 Two years (24 issues) at $7.00
Additional postage: Canada 50¢, Foreign $1.00.
Please remit by check or money order.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

PLEASE PRINT SM 96

the water merchant

by . . . Leslie Charteris

Simon conceded that Doc Nemford's proposition had great possibilities. The question, was, who was to benefit. . . .

"I'LL TELL you what I think of Foreign Aid," said the Saint, thoughtfully twisting the newspaper into the semblance of a short rope. "I think that if the Commies had assigned their best brains to inventing a gimmick that'd bleed America like a built-in leak in the economy, they couldn't have come up with anything cleverer."

"I don't know about that," Howard Mayne said. "But—"

"It saddles the poor squirming US taxpayer with an annual bill of billions of dollars, for which he gets nothing but jobs for the gaggle of bureaucrats who administer it."

"Perhaps; but—"

"The more advanced countries simply hate him a bit more, down inside, the way all proud people who are down on their luck react to being charity cases. The more backward ones simply insist more loudly that there must be no strings attached—which means that *their* bureaucrats want no check on how much of the gravy they can siphon off into their own pockets, while they personally take all the credit for what little trickles through to the populace, which is probably still

THE SAINT HAD NO OBJECTION TO HELPING TYCOONS, AS SUCH—BUT HE HAD OTHER PECULIAR PREJUDICES.

out throwing rotten eggs at American ambassadors."

"You'd better not let any *Daily Worker* correspondent hear you. He'd discover that you were an imperialist, colonialist—"

"I damn well am an imperialist colonialist," Simon Templar agreed, warming to his subject. "I think the old British Empire, on the whole, was one of the best things this world has ever known. The good old colonialists went out into the wilderness and tamed a lot of insanitary savages, brought them down out of trees or up out of mud huts, taught them to wash themselves and stop eating their elderly relatives for dinner, and with a few exceptions left them a hell of a lot better off than they would have made themselves in another three centuries, just in exchange for exploiting some natural resources that the benighted heathen didn't know what to do with anyhow. So all they get for it is a lot of abuse, mostly from characters who wouldn't know how to spell the word if it wasn't for the education the wicked imperialists crammed into them. I think it's an everlasting pity that more Englishmen didn't have the guts to stand up and trumpet the facts, instead of being hustled into dropping their colonies like naughty boys caught with a fistful of stolen candy—by a lot of bloody-handed Russians, and sanctimonious Americans firmly settled in one of the biggest countries ever swiped from its aborigines."

"You may be right," Mayne said placatingly. "But I was talking about a matter of Domestic Aid. Just because I mentioned that there was some phony-sounding Arab in the background shouldn't get us off on all these tangents."

With his pleasantly ugly face and competent air, he looked like the very personification of the idealized detective familiar to every television watcher, and the fact that he was not playing such a part every week for a network sponsor was a commentary on the unpredictable hazards of acting as a profession rather than on his personal talent.

Mrs. Sophie Yarmouth, his aunt, a determined woman who was also present, chimed in more forcefully: "Howard is right, Mr. Templar. You're only trying to dodge the issue. You set yourself up once as a guardian of society against racketeers and swindlers, so you have a duty to do something about them whenever a case is laid in your lap. Just as you did when you cleared up that affair that I got involved in."

Because of his friendship with Howard Mayne, the Saint had once recouped a ten thousand dollar investment that Mrs. Yarmouth had once made with a good bunco artist, as has been recounted elsewhere in these

chronicles. When he had phoned Mayne on this subsequent transit through Los Angeles, however, it had only been to invite himself for a sociable drink, with no suspicion that he might be drafted to bring succor to another sucker. But such inflictions were among the occupational overhead of the life he had chosen for himself, and sometimes they had to be accepted.

"Okay," he said resignedly. "I'll drop in on your poor relations from Texas on my way through La Jolla. Although trying to save an oil tycoon from being taken for a few grand, even if this proposition he's interested in *is* a swindle, strikes me as almost as important a project as sending Foreign Aid to some Persian-Gulf Poobah who's having trouble meeting the tab for a hundred-girl harem."

Walt Jobyn, to do him justice even at the expense of flattery, could never have been seriously compared with the lord of a hundred-girl harem. He had quite enough to cope with in the person of his one lawful wedded wife, Felicity, a lady of Amazonian build and an equivalently positive personality, whose affectionate concern for his welfare had an intensity that might have made a strong man quail.

Mr. Jobyn was not built on this heroic scale, having been a lean and often hungry cowboy until the barren section on which he was raising a few head of hamburger cattle had found itself in the very center of a circumference of deep holes which had been bored by an exploring contingent of oil-sniffing geologists. The fees he had been able to exact for letting other similar perforations be made in his land had thereafter relieved him of all financial problems other than those of making tax returns and finding ways to invest a residue which was still more than a spouse with unlimited charge accounts could spend.

In spite of these frightful burdens, Mr. Jobyn had not changed very much except in such superficial details as having cleaner fingernails and a wardrobe by Neiman-Marcus instead of Levi Strauss, and his reception of the Saint was as heartily hospitable as if he had been home on the range instead of in the lobby of the fanciest hotel in La Jolla, that self-styled jewel of the Southern California coast some ten miles above San Diego.

"I sure am glad to see yuh," he said, giving Simon a powerful bony handshake. "I've read so much about yuh, I feel like I'd knowed yuh ever since I was a boy. And yet yuh don't look that old."

"I cheat," said the Saint. "I take things like vitamins and exercise. And I'm too stupid to worry, which is what makes dig-

nified gray hair and distinguished wrinkles."

"Yuh look mighty good to me," Jobyn said. "I wish I was stupid like you. Or Felicity didn't think she was so smart. I'm hopin' yuh'll be able to straighten her out about this investment I'm thinkin' of makin'. She's been goin' on at me so hard, I declare yuh might think I was figurin' on buyin' into a bawdy house instead of a legitimate business."

They perched on stools at the bar, and Simon accepted a Peter Dawson. Jobyn tasted a straight shot and told the bartender to leave them the bottle.

"Yes, sir," he said, "anyone 'ud think I wasn't bright enough to spot a wooden nickel if it had termites crawlin' all over it."

"You sound very sure that this business *is* legitimate," Simon said.

"O' course I'm sure," Jobyn said pettishly. "Otherwise I wouldn't be figurin' on buyin' into it. Ain't nobody told yuh nothin' about it?"

"All I know is that Mrs. Yarmouth said you were on the point of being taken for a small fortune by some faker who claims to be able to get fresh water from the sea."

"That's the way Sophie *would* put it. She's on Felicity's side, naturally, being as they're cousins. And if Felicity had her way about it, there wouldn't be any satellites goin' around the earth, because she'd 've called anyone who said he could send a rocket into space a faker, just because nobody ever done it before. You wait till yuh meet Doc Nemford. You'll see for yuhself he's a real serious scientific fella."

Felicity Jobyn, whom Simon met at lunch, had her own version of this.

"The only serious science he knows," she stated categorically, "is how to part a fool from his money."

"Now, why do yuh keep sayin' that, Felicity?" protested the tycoon plaintively. "You've seen him yuhself, pumpin' sea water through this machine of his, an' it comin' out sweet as a mountain spring, just as fast as he puts it in."

"I've seen it but I still don't believe it, like I've seen a magician saw a woman in half."

"It isn't altogether impossible —this water business, I mean," Simon ventured. "They already know quite a few ways of doing it. But so far they haven't been able to make one cheap enough to be commercially attractive."

"And they aren't likely to," Mrs. Jobyn said crisply. "It's against Nature, that's all."

If the Saint had been President, he would have appointed her ambassador to Moscow. No mere second-generation disciple of Stalin would have put anything over on her.

"You're probably right," he

said diplomatically. "But I have met a few crackpot inventors who actually invented something. I'd like to see this trick for myself."

"You do that," said Mrs. Jobyn, "and then tell Walt how it's done. Maybe that'll get some sense into his stubborn head."

The mother of Mr. Nemford, for such reasons as motivate parents, had had him christened with the name of Stanley, but that was a fact which he revealed only to such tiresome officials as insisted on a meticulous filling out of forms. To everyone else, even in his teens, he had never been anything but "Doc"—a cognomen which fitted him like the proverbial glove, and which had pointed the way to an almost predestined career from the first time he had studied himself analytically in a mirror. With the congenital advantages of intense deep-set eyes sandwiched between a bulging forehead and ascetically hollow cheeks leading to a thin artistic jaw, even before he was old enough to vote he had looked more like a doctor of something highly intellectual than most men who had worked for years to earn the title.

The house where he was living in the vicinity of Mission Beach, about six miles south of La Jolla, was perfectly appropriate for an unworldly scientist or a struggling inventor. "Cottage" would have been a determined salesman's word for it, but "shack" would have been a description more realistic than real estate agents professionally care to be. In those days there was still a considerable colony of such clapboard shanties clustered around the lagoon which the coast road skirted on the west and the main highway to San Diego evaded inland, doomed soon to be mowed down by the inexorable march of building-code suburban progress, but surviving for a little while as one of the last relics of a more picturesque and carefree pre-boom and pre-industrial California which even a man without a gray hair on his head might remember as a dim once-upon-a-time.

From Doc Nemford's point of view, its greatest asset, far outweighing the drafty windows, antique plumbing, and incredibly shabby furniture, was its private pier, which projected some 40 feet out into the lagoon from his narrow frontage on the water. Some much earlier landlord or tenant had created it by pile-driving lengths of three-inch pipe into the bottom of the shallow bay until they stood firm, connecting them with elbows and other threaded lengths of galvanized pipe, and overlaying this framework with a series of occasionally horizontal planks. The resultant structure might not have met any conventional engineering specifications, but it did provide a platform on which a number of rea-

sonably sized and careful people could walk out a little way over the tidal waters of the inlet.

Simon Templar was one of a small party who did this that afternoon, in the train of Doc Nemford, who was trundling his contrivance in front of him on an ordinary garden wheelbarrow. The other members of the equipage were Walt Jobyn, who had presented the Saint as a possible partner in his investment, and the Arab emissary who had sparked the Saint's diatribe on the subject of Foreign Aid merely by being mentioned, a Colonel Hamzah.

Hamzah was a short but portly man with crinkly black hair, an enormous nose, and teeth as big as piano ivories, some of which were likewise black. He had said "How do you do?" when he was introduced, and therewith seemed to have exhausted his vocabulary; but to every other remark that was addressed to him, and some that were not, he responded with a vast if non-committal display of his keyboard incisors.

Doc Nemford, however, had welcomed the Saint with an amiable vagueness that went well with his scholarly mien, and revealed no trace of guilt or apprehension. In the Saint's ruthless system of reasoning, this still left open the possibilities that Nemford was a consummate actor, or that he was one of an increasingly rarer breed of innocents to whom the name of Simon Templar did not immediately evoke "The Robin Hood of Modern Crime" as an almost liturgical response. But he had betrayed no reluctance whatever to the proposal that he should give another demonstration of his process.

"Colonel Hamzah had asked me to let him make another quantity test, in any case," he said. "I'm sure he won't mind if you watch it."

Hamzah had presumably acquiesced with one of his dental exposures.

"What principle are you working on?" Simon inquired.

"The elementary principle that water is basically a simple liquid, and anything you put into it you should be able to take out," Nemford said indulgently. "If the thing was a lump or iron, you'd say that was obvious. Well, a sodium molecule isn't fundamentally different, it's only very much smaller."

"Does that mean it should be as easy as getting the eggs back out of an omelette?" asked the Saint ingenuously.

"That isn't quite the same," Nemford replied with unruffled patience. "Nobody has ever claimed to be able to do that. But everyone knows at least one way to get fresh water from the sea. By evaporation, for instance. Of course, that's much too slow to be efficient on a large scale. There are other ways—ion exchange

and so forth—but they're quite expensive too, even with atomic power. So I won't waste time trying to explain them. My method is completely different, anyhow."

"And what *is* your method, Doc?"

"It would be quite difficult to explain in layman's language," said the inventor pleasantly. "I could throw a lot of long words at you, but unless you've studied very advanced physics you really wouldn't be any the wiser. For the moment, I'd much rather give you the proof of the pudding. Would someone help me to put this on the wheelbarrow?"

The object which Simon helped him to load was shaped roughly like a large aluminum doughnut about three feet in diameter, mounted on edge on a rectangular base of the same length and some four inches thick. Also mounted on one end of the same base was an ordinary one-horsepower electric pump. A few levers, valves, dials, knobs, and nozzles protruded from the doughnut at sundry points. The entire apparatus, in spite of its massive appearance, could not have weighed much more than a hundred pounds.

At the end of the pier, they unloaded it again where several boards had been braced together with an iron plate of more recent vintage than the rest of the structure. Nemford alone jockeyed and jiggled the contraption on this footing until he could anchor it there with four enormous bolts which he had in his pockets, which fitted through holes in the base of his machine down into corresponding threaded holes in the iron floor plate, into which he tightened them with a wrench.

"This thing vibrates quite a bit," he explained, "and if it wasn't screwed down it'd shimmy right off the pier."

He lowered a thick length of hose that trailed from the pump down into the water, and plugged the pump's electrical connection into the receptacle at the end of a conduit that ran out from the shore. The motor hummed, and after a few seconds water gushed from the output side of the pump, which at that moment was not linked with the mysterious doughnut.

"Would you test it yourself?" Nemford said to the Saint, almost apologetically. "Just so that you won't have to wonder if it really is salt."

Simon caught a spoonful in one cupped hand, and wet his lips and tongue with it. He nodded.

"It's salt."

Nemford shut off the pump and turned to Hamzah.

"Now, Colonel, those gauges you wanted to try?" The Arab produced them from a cardboard box which he had been toting mysteriously under his arm, and Nemford examined them with detached approval. "Ah, good, I

see you already had them adapted for my couplings."

He helped Hamzah to install the instruments, one in the hose connection which he completed between the pump and the doughnut, the other on what seemed to be the outlet nozzle of the system. Then he plugged the pump in again, and connected another wire from it to the main contrivance.

Once more the pump whirred; and this time the big doughnut also regurgitated, sobbed, shuddered, and settled into some quivering internal activity. Doc Nemford calmly adjusted a stopcock, and twiddled a vernier; and the output spout dribbled, spat, hiccupped, and finally began to squirt a steady stream of clear fluid which splashed over the planking and drained back down into the bay.

Nemford was complacently lighting an old battered pipe. He glanced quizzically up at the Saint over his match.

"Would you care to try a sip of that water, Mr. Templar?"

Simon used his hand again to make the same test as before. The water did not exactly recall a mountain spring, as Walt Jobyn had proclaimed it, being a little too warm for that, and having some slight chemical taint which only a very sensitive palate might have detected; but it indisputably did not taste salt.

"It's fresh," he agreed, as dispassionately as he had classified the water first brought up by the pump.

"Well?" clamored his Texan sponsor. "What more d'yuh want?"

At that moment the Saint could not have answered, even if he had been quite sure that he knew.

"I think it's a great gadget," he said cautiously.

Colonel Hamzah was not even interested in the salinity or otherwise of the water, having doubtless satisfied himself on that score in previous demonstrations. He was busily peering at his gauges, taking readings from the dials and intermittently consulting a turnip-sized stop-watch, and jotting down figures in a leather-bound notebook.

"You've noticed that the output pressure is higher than the input," Nemford said, looking over his shoulder. "That's an effect of the cyclic acceleration of the—er—well, let's call it the separating device. What you should concentrate on is the rate of flow at the output. I think you'll find it's just about as much as a pipe that size will carry—which means that you're getting fresh water as fast as you can pump."

Hamzah signified agreement with another beaming octave of dentition, and bent to examine the wire which Nemford had connected from the pump to a terminal which apparently con-

ducted to the innards of the doughnut.

"Yes, you really should have put a meter in the circuit," Nemford clucked intuitively. "I wish you *could* take a reading on the exact amount of current it takes to operate the separator. If I tell you, you mightn't believe me. But you can see that the wire isn't any heavier than you'd find on an electric toaster, and you can feel that it isn't overheating. You don't have to be an electrical engineer for that to tell you that it isn't carrying much current. In fact, the load is only about six hundred watts. There's no hidden catch in this process, such as finding that it calls for a dollar's worth of other electric power for every penny you'd spend on pumping."

Hamzah nodded appreciatively, and made further notes in his book.

"Well, *pardner*?" Jobyn prodded, with impatient emphasis. "What d'yuh say?"

Simon took time out to light a cigarette.

It would be erroneous to assume that he regarded all inventors as crackpots or crooks. He had met all kinds; and every student of these chronicles will recall a few whose genuineness had been unquestionable from the start, and a few about whom even the Saint had guessed wrong.

"May I hear what the deal is again?" he said.

"Certainly," Nemford answered. "I'm asking two hundred thousand dollars cash for all rights. I can live very comfortably on that for the rest of my days, according to my standards, and I don't want to be bothered with royalty statements and accountants and income tax returns."

"Do you have a patent on this gizzmo?"

"I do not. If I did, the process would be available to anyone who can read, and all I'd have is the chance to spend my money on lawyers to sue anybody who infringed it. I wouldn't even have that privilege in a lot of countries that don't even recognize American patents. You don't patent guided missiles and the latest improvements in radar!"

"But what protection would we have in trying to exploit your process?"

Nemford leaned over and disconnected the pump, and shut off a valve. The motor hummed down the scale to silence, the big doughnut vibrated into stillness, and the water stopped gushing from the outlet. It became much quieter out on the pier, and easier to talk.

"If you want a patent, you can apply for one yourselves. You know that nobody's ahead of you, or the whole world would have heard of it. But a person who had a few millions to work with, like Mr. Jobyn, could do a lot better,

in my humble opinion. He could go to any community that desperately needs water, and build a plant at his own expense and sell water to them. He could do this all over the world. And I think he should be able to hire a few technicians who could be trusted with the secret part of the installation, which is really comparatively small. A Government, of course" — Nemford addressed himself impartially to Hamzah— "could count on men with the same security rating as they would trust with military secrets."

Simon nodded.

"But before all that, what's to stop some unscrupulous character swiping your machine somehow and opening it up to see what makes it go?"

Nemford smiled faintly.

"Naturally I've had to think of that. So I booby-trapped this model with a small charge of explosive inside. If anyone who didn't know exactly how to go about it tried to open it up, the explosion would destroy the core of the machine and probably injure him quite seriously. A similar device could protect the vital part of a full-sized plant against unauthorized prying."

Simon gazed broodingly at the remarkable engine with his hands thrust deep into his pockets. It was the kind of thing that any science-fiction writer might have fabricated, yet it was conservative in comparison with some of the marvels which humanity had become used to in the last decade. And he did not have to be convinced that there could be a fortune in it—for somebody.

He was aware that the other three were watching him expectantly, awaiting his verdict with almost embarrassing respect. Walt Jobyn was uninhibitedly fidgetting with the same eagerness that Colonel Hamzah betrayed only with the restless swivelling of his bright black eyes. Doc Nemford's attention was the most placid of the three, as if he felt completely confident that any eventual decision must be favorable to him, and even a first negative reaction would only be a temporary if tiresome setback.

Simon straightened up a little and looked at him.

"I think you've got a potential gold mine here, Doc," he said. "Or maybe I should call it something almost as good as an oil well—"

"Yiihoo!" uttered Mr. Jobyn, or some similar sound. "That's my pardner. I can't wait till I hear yuh tell Felicity. But first we gotta get this deal sewed up . . ."

He groped at his pockets, shuffling his feet in a small dance of exasperation at the minor obstructions he encountered.

Colonel Hamzah's dark bullfrog eyes had already veiled over with pharaonic inscrutability, and he had turned away to occupy himself ostentatiously with re-

moving the gauges that he had coupled into Nemford's miraculous plumbing.

"I'll write yuh a check," Jobyn said, flourishing the book that he finally found. "Ten per cent on account, just to seal the bargain. You see your lawyer fust thing tomorrow an' have him draw up somethin' that says you sold me all rights in this here doohickey. An' tell him to make it short an' straight so even I can understand it. If I have to get another lawyer to translate it, I don't want it."

"I don't need your deposit," Nemford said awkwardly. "I'll take your word that you mean business. And I can put down a sale of all rights myself in a few lines. I sympathize with your point of view about that—if it's a straightforward deal, there's no need for twenty pages of hedging. But . . ."

"But what, man?"

Nemford's embarrassment had become so acute that he seemed to wish he had starved before he ever offered his discovery for sale.

"Well . . . when we wind this up, I'll turn over this model to you, without the booby trap, and all my specifications and blueprints. Now, if you changed your mind an hour later, and decided to stop payment on your check for the full price, you'd still have everything of mine, and you could have had my drawings copied a hundred times, and all I could do would be to sue you . . . Of course I'm not suggesting that you *would;* but you *could.* After all, I don't really know anything about you, except that you're *supposed* to own a lot of oil wells. Do you understand?"

Walt Jobyn stared at him for a moment, with his weathered face taking on a slight tinge of *beetroot;* and then he let out an equine squeal of laughter and slapped the inventor resoundingly on the back.

"Well, fan mah britches," he chortled. "You're as right as yuh can be, Doc, an' yuh had the guts to come straight out with it. I like that. Okay, then, you tell me how yuh think we should do it."

"I'd be scared to death to have all that money in cash," Nemford said. "But cashier's checks are just about as final, aren't they? I mean, you can't stop them or take them back. You could give me five of them, say, for forty thousand each, so that I could put them in different banks as I'd probably want to. But as soon as you gave them to me, I'd hand everything over."

"If that'll make yuh happy, Doc, that's the way it'll be." Jobyn frowned. "But it'll be the day after tomorrow at the soonest before I can get those checks from my bank in Texas, unless I charter a private plane to fetch 'em."

"That's all right, Mr. Jobyn," Nemford said, with his normal composure coming back again.

"Whenever they get here, you can give me a call and come over and we'll make the exchange."

"Provided somebody hasn't stolen those blueprints meanwhile," Simon put in. "Or are they booby-trapped too?"

Nemford shook his head.

"I don't think they need to be. They're in a safe deposit box at my bank."

"I won't even ask yuh which bank, Doc," Jobyn said jovially, "in case yuh think I might put Mr. Templar here up to bustin' into it."

The joke did not seem to make any special impression on his audience.

"That's fine, then," Nemford said with an air of sober relief, and picked up his wrench to attack the bolts that secured his model. "Now if you won't mind helping me get this back to the house . . ."

They assisted him to load his machine back on the wheelbarrow and cart it back to the shore, and there Jobyn held out his hand.

"We made a deal, Doc," he said heartily. "I'll be talkin' to yuh soon with them checks in mah hand. An' when yuh feel like takin' a trip somewhere, you should come to Texas an' *see* mah oil wells."

He offered the same hand to Hamzah.

"Too bad yuh lost out, Colonel," he said generously. "You should've made up your mind quicker—yuh could easily, not havin' to listen to a back-seat-drivin' wife, like me. Even if yuh got a dozen of 'em, you fellas got enough sense to keep 'em locked up in a harem. But better luck next time, anyhow."

The Arabian delegate accepted the hand gingerly, and winced at the shake, but managed a toothily courteous grimace.

"Y'know, pardner," Jobyn observed as they drove away, "Felicity's goin' to be spittin' like a scalded bobcat when she hears this water-makin' invention is as genuine as I been tellin' her all along. She'll like to tear your hair out for backin' me up."

"I can imagine that," said the Saint. "So since she isn't my wife, I'd just as soon pass up that exhilarating privilege, if it's all the same to you."

Jobyn seemed to wilt slightly in the mid-act of igniting a celebratory cigar of sufficient caliber to have defended the Alamo.

"But I was countin' on *you* to—"

"Why should either of us ask for trouble? Is there any law in Texas that everything has to be done in your joint names? Does she add up your bank statement every month? Does it take both your signatures to write a check?"

"No. but—"

"I'll bet that when you were courting, Walt, you thought she'd be a right cute little filly to rope and tie. But not so long after she

had your name on a marriage license, you found she'd grown into a bucking bronco—and she was riding you!"

"How did yuh know that?"

"One day I'm going to write a book about the Great American Wife. But meanwhile I'll give you a free preview of the last chapter. It says: she's only the fault of the Great American Husband. He gave up too easily. I suppose it's too late for him to go back to the good healthy custom of belting her in the mouth any time she opens it out of turn. But if she wants to make out she's so much smarter than he is, on strictly intellectual terms, then he's got a right to outsmart her if he can."

Mr. Jobyn squinted up at him sidelong.

"What yuh gettin' at, Mr. Templar?"

"You said it yourself to Hamzah. However many wives he's got, he keeps 'em locked up and he doesn't tell them about his business. Now, you could hardly start a harem with Felicity, but she's only one, and you should be able to handle her. Go back and tell her you still think Nemford has a gold mine, and I said it looked good too, but in deference to her great wisdom you decided not to invest in it. This makes her love you to death; but inside, she wonders . . ."

"But—"

"Then you go ahead with what you already decided. And after it's made you a few millions, the next time she's getting really ornery, you can say: 'Now I come to think of it, sweetheart, I forgot to tell you how much I made out of the last time I didn't take your advice.' And you sock her with the figures, for the first time . . . On the other hand, until this deal does pay off, and even if by sheer bad luck it never does, you'll never have to squirm while she tells you what a dope you were."

The immediate representative of the second biggest of the United States mulled this shamelessly pragmatic proposition under an intensely corrugated brow for several seconds, and came up jubilantly slapping his thigh.

"Goll dang it," he said exuberantly, "I think yuh got the answer I was lookin' for. An' I ain't the man to forget it. How much do *you* figure to invest in this here process?"

"Not much more than I already have," said the Saint. "With taxes the way they are, I can't afford to be a millionaire; and I can't take a profit from giving matrimonial advice without losing my amateur standing. But some day if I get desperate I may stop at one of your wells with a bucket."

He dropped Jobyn at the hotel in La Jolla, and firmly declined to stay for dinner or even for a drink, claiming that he was already overdue at the home of the

friends he had been on his way to visit in San Diego.

"If you're going to play it the way I suggested, you shouldn't need any moral support when you talk to Felicity. Not at this stage, anyway," he said. "But I'll give you the phone number where I'm staying, and you can call me any time you have qualms."

For his host he had a slightly different story, merely to avert the tedium of more complicated explanations.

"I have to see a fellow at Mission Beach about a small business deal that a pal of mine asked me to check on," he said with careful casualness, as they were finishing dinner. "D'you mind if I run over there and join you at the Yacht Club later? It shouldn't take me an hour, at the very worst."

He had memorized the location of Doc Nemford's shack so accurately that he did not need to drive within a hundred yards of it. He parked his car an inconspicuous block away, and strolled down an alley with a chipped and faded signboard at the entrance that offered *"Boats & Bait."*

Simon had seen the boats from Nemford's jetty, and had been less than excited as a nautical connoisseur. At close quarters they looked even less picturesque and more unseaworthy; but he was not planning an extended cruise. There were no oars or other conventional means of propulsion in sight, the livery operator having no doubt thoughtfully secured them inside the padlocked shed from which he did his business, but the Saint did not have to search far for a discarded four-foot piece of board that would serve as an adequate paddle for the voyage he had in mind.

He quietly nursed the least leaky skiff he could select along the shore line to Nemford's property, and let it drift up to the pier and even under it.

There was only a half moon that night, and the sky was murky, but Simon had a pencil flashlight to help him in the dark corners, though he used it with the most furtive discretion. He verified certain structural possibilities that had intrigued him, and then hitched the painter to one of the pilings and swung himself nimbly up on to the decking.

There was glow of light behind the ground-floor curtains of Nemford's cottage, and the Saint moved like a drifting shadow towards an open window until the murmur of voices inside resolved itself into distinct words and equally clear identifications of the speakers.

The first to emerge into this unconscious clarity was Nemford himself, who was saying: "You're asking me to go back on my word to Mr. Jobyn. I know we haven't signed anything yet, but we shook hands on a deal."

Simon could not see into the room from any angle, but the accent and context of the next speech made visual confirmation supererogatory.

"I appreciate your problem, Doctor, and I am prepared to compensate you for your embarrassment. I have spoken by telephone to Cairo, and I am authorized to pay you fifty thousand dollars more to change your mind about this bargain with Mr. Jobyn. I am sure that if he changed his mind, *he* would not be bound by the handshake."

"But suppose, then, he wanted to offer me more?"

"If you accept my price, you need not be here to listen to him. Perhaps it would be wiser if you were not, in case he is only angry. But I cannot haggle as in a bazaar. I was talking to you first, I remind you, and I deserved the right to make the first bid. But since I make the second, it is also the last for me. A quarter of a million dollars, Doctor. The extra money will almost pay your tax on the transaction."

There was a pause.

"But when would you expect to pay me, Colonel? You remember, I had to tell Mr. Jobyn that I only had his word for his oil wells. I hate to say this sort of thing, but after all, how do I know that your Government will back you up? And meanwhile, if I alienate Mr. Jobyn—"

"My Embassy is being ordered tonight to let me have the money. As soon as the bank is open in Washington tomorrow morning, they can send it to me. Because of the time difference, it can arrive here as soon as the banks open in San Diego. Tell me which bank you keep your papers in, and I have it sent there. We meet, I give you the money, you give me the blueprints. It is so simple."

"What about the model?"

"Aha. We take it with us to the bank, in a taxi. The taxi waits. When we have finished, I take the taxi to the airport. My Government would not pay so much money to compete with Mr. Jobyn, it means very much to our prestige to have your invention exclusively. Of course you would not think of giving him the model with some more blueprints —you are an honorable man— but I am ordered to bring it with me, and my suggestion is most practical."

The craftily candid exposure of teeth that must have accompanied this could be heard in the voice.

"Would you be leaving at once?"

"Yes, you will have to face Mr. Jobyn alone. If you decide to wait for him. But I am afraid your Government might take his part if they knew I was taking away something they might officially lend to us for political considerations. I expect to be highly commended if I make that impossible. So, I would prefer

to be out of your country before anyone complains."

Another pause.

Simon could picture Doc Nemford chewing on his pipe, his tall taut brow furrowed with earnest deliberation.

At last—

"All right, Colonel. I'll have to accept. I just want you to realize that I'm not being influenced by the price you're offering. The reason is, I'm ashamed of having almost let you down. As you had to remind me, you *were* the first customer. But with Mr. Jobyn throwing his oil wells at me, and that chap he brought with him today—"

"Who was he?"

"One of the world's greatest experts in this field, though you'd never guess it to look at him. But when *he* said my invention looked good, I knew I'd never be able to stop Mr. Jobyn elbowing you out of the way."

"Do not feel too unhappy about him," Hamzah said magnanimously. "He still can throw his oil wells somewhere else. Now, let us set a time. I will call for you at ten o'clock. By then, I shall have made a box in which your model can be packed, and you will have removed the explosive. With your permission, I will take the measurements . . ."

Simon had no need to hear any more. He retreated as softly as he had approached, lowered himself into the dinghy, and paddled it silently back to where he had borrowed it.

He was at the Yacht Club within the hour he had allotted for the detour, and wholeheartedly enjoyed the rest of an unimportant evening without thinking it necessary to say any more about his brief digression. Nor did he feel obliged to spoil Walt Jobyn's evening by phoning him that night.

Even after a large late breakfast the next morning he was not overpowered by any urge to make the call, but took a much livelier interest in the fact that it looked like a perfect day to go sailing, as had been tentatively proposed before they went to bed.

"I'm afraid I'll hold you up a bit, though," he said. "I've got to drop by and see this merchant I visited last night again. Some papers I have to see were at his bank, and he's getting them out this morning. I can't put it off, because one of the characters involved is catching a plane east around midday. Could we meet at the Club for an early lunch and blast off right afterwards?"

It may be interesting for some future analyst to note that for a man of such complicated activities the Saint seldom found himself constrained to lie. He could nearly always phrase the literal truth in such a way that the listener received the exact impression that the Saint wanted him to

have. It was a technique which eliminated all the hazardous overhead of keeping conflicting stories straight and mutually harmonious, while at the same time adding a certain private spice to what might otherwise have been mere routine dialogue.

In this case, it also won the Saint a sufficient margin of unquestioned time, during which he could drive peacefully back to Mission Beach, with no unseemly desperate eye glued to the clock and mileometer, and arrive within sight of the front entrance of Doc Nemford's shack, near the same parking spot that he had found before, at a moment intelligently calculated to succeed the Nemford-Hamzah safari to the bank, but also to precede the predictable return of Nemford alone.

Thus when Doc Nemford walked back into his own temporary home, a little before noon, he found a lean bronze-faced man comfortably extended between the best chair in the living-room and the handiest table-top on which a pair of very long legs could conveniently park their extremities.

"Come on in, Doc," Simon encouraged him hospitably. "I hope you don't mind me making myself at home."

"No, why not?" Nemford said with pardonable vagueness. "If I'd known you were coming—but I wasn't expecting Mr. Jobyn till tomorrow—"

"Let's both save a little time," Simon suggested soothingly. "I'll put my cards on the table, and you do the same, and we'll work out the score like well-brought-up scientists. I was still trying to make up my mind whether you knew who I was, right up until I heard you give Hamzah the clincher last night. Well, as one of the world's greatest experts in this field, though you'd never guess it to look at me, I'd like to give you an award as the best player of a busted flush that I've sat in with in a long elegy of these games. Once the chips began to fly, you squeezed your hand to the last pip."

Doc Nemford fumbled out his pipe and pouch and began the restorative mechanisms of stoking one from the other.

"What else could I do?" he said. "You kept me guessing yourself—right up until now, I was trying to decide whether I'd fooled you."

"You weren't so far from it, chum. You had a nice explanation of why the fresh water came out of your gadget with more pressure than you were pumping the sea water in—but if you ever do it again, it'd be better to put a pressure reducer in the circuit and not have to explain anything. Sometimes these city water systems carry an awful head of steam . . . You don't have anything like that to worry about with the electric consumption, even if someone

like Hamzah did hook a meter into the line: I'm sure the vibrator inside your model doesn't draw a lot of extra juice . . . And even the valve that you open and shut when you're demonstrating doesn't give away the gimmick—in fact, it's a good piece of business."

"Then what actually did make you suspicious?"

"First off, only my own low dishonest mind. If I'd stood and watched the Red Sea open for the Israelites, the first thing I'd've wondered about was how it might have been faked. Now, the way that pier of yours is built is probably a perfectly common method of construction, but to me it suggested plumbing. And that gave me the idea that in a tubular tangle of that kind, nobody else might notice a couple of extra pipes—one of 'em joined into a piling to take the pumped-up bay water back where it came from, and the other running back to shore to connect with your house supply. Then I tried to figure out how a crook could switch the flow—"

"And how could he?"

"With a base plate set in the dock, to which he would bolt the base of his ingenious gizzmo, using outsize bolts that he took from his pocket and put back there, and which were the only incidental equipment that nobody got a good look at. Bolts which I'm certain are hollow, with outlets in the right places, so that when you screw them down they become the most miraculous part of your invention. One of 'em side-tracks the salt water you're pumping up, and the other takes in the fresh water which is one of the civic amenities for which you are privileged to pay taxes on this dump."

"And on this imaginative basis alone—"

"No, I'm not supernatural. I didn't have any more to start with than an interesting doubt. But before I carried it to the bitter end—which included a rather minute study of the pipe connections underneath your pier last night—I'd convinced myself with a rather more arbitrary test."

"And what was that?" Nemford inquired, with the intensest unfeigned interest.

"I'd tasted your manufactured fresh water," said the Saint. "I happen to have rather sensitive taste buds, which I have raised on a diet of the best vintage wines. They aren't so familiar with water, unless it was splashing down a mountain trout stream. But they can still recognize the tang of chlorine in a city supply."

Nemford sucked at his pipe, holding a match steadily over the bowl.

"You deserve all the things I've heard about you," he said. "But why didn't you say any of this yesterday?"

"I was interested to see how the scenario would work out. If you won't think I'm being patronizing, I'd call it a kind of nostalgia. I admired a lot of touches in your technique. You handled the financial angles brilliantly—just the right pressure where it would do the most good. And I know you'll do well with those travellers' checks you were talking about—you can cash them abroad in so many places where they don't ask questions."

Doc Nemford made a deprecating gesture.

"I'm trying to make a living, like the rest of us, Saint."

"And I'm not greedy. I told Jobyn I thought you had a good deal, because I figured that would bring Hamzah back with a higher bid, and so I'd be keeping Jobyn out of trouble. But at the same time it was a help to you, and my dear old grandmother taught me never to take part in a swindle unless I made something out of it for myself."

Doc Nemford nodded philosophically.

"How much do you want?" he asked.

"I'll settle for fifty thousand dollars, which I earned for you anyhow, so you shouldn't begrudge it. And you can write Jobyn a letter and tell him you're sorry to renege on the deal but you couldn't resist that extra dough—and see that you've left town before he receives it."

Nemford took from his wallet a small sheaf of cashier's checks, selected one, and indorsed it on the back to the order of Simon Templar.

"You're a lot fairer than I thought you'd be," he said. "In fact, I didn't think you'd let me get away with anything if you were wise to me."

"Frankly, if the victim had been almost anyone else, I wouldn't, Doc. But now for the rest of my life I can dream of the expression on Nasser's face, when Hamzah arrives with his trophies and they find out what they've bought. I shall feel that I've personally done something about Foreign Aid," said the Saint.

SIXTY THOUSAND SPIES?

LT. COL. SIEGFRIED DOMBROWSKI, the highest ranking East German espionage official to flee to the West so far, is quoted as saying that the Communist spy network operating out of East Berlin employs 60,000 agents, 12,000 of whom work in Western Europe. Deputy Chief—until he fled—of the "Administration for Coordination," Ministry for State Security, and a party member for the past 25 years, the 43-year-old officer had been in charge of military espionage in Western Europe. He fled because one of his agents had been arrested, a member of his family was in trouble, and it seemed as if he himself might end up in prison.

his heart could break

by . . . Craig Rice

Yes, Palmer had gotten the message—and he'd been hysterically happy. And still he'd killed himself! Why?

JOHN J. MALONE shuddered. He wished he could get the insidious melody out of his mind—or, remember the rest of the words.

"As I passed by the ol' state's prison,
Ridin' on a stream-line' train—"

It had been annoying him since three o'clock that morning, when he'd heard it sung by the janitor of Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar.

It seemed like a bad omen, and it made him uncomfortable. Or maybe it was the cheap gin he'd switched to between two and four A.M. that was making him uncomfortable. Whichever it was, he felt terrible.

"I bet your client's happy today," the guard said cordially, leading the way towards the death house.

"He ought to be," Malone growled. He reminded himself that he too ought to be happy. He wasn't. Maybe it was being in a

---

As we've said before, in the quietly zany world of John J. Malone, that modest Chicago barrister, the man—or the woman—whom everybody loves usually ends up very very dead. Paul Palmer, whose passing is reported here, is no exception to this rule. But his death is of course avenged.

Copyright, 1943, by The American Mercury, Inc.
Reprinted by permission of the author's agents,
Scott Meredith Literary Agency, Inc.

prison that depressed him. John J. Malone didn't like prisons. He devoted his life to keeping his clients out of them.

"Then the warden told me gently—"

That song again! How did the next line go?

"Well," the guard said, "they say you've never lost a client yet." It wouldn't do any harm, he thought, to get on the good side of a smart guy like John J. Malone.

"Not yet," Malone said. He'd had a close call with this one, though.

"You sure did a wonderful job, turning up the evidence to get a new trial," the guard rattled on. Maybe Malone could get him a better appointment, with his political drag. "Your client sure felt swell when he heard about it last night, he sure did."

"That's good," Malone said noncommittally. It hadn't been evidence that had turned the trick, though. Just a little matter of knowing some interesting facts about the judge's private life. The evidence would have to be manufactured before the trial, but that was the least of his worries. By that time, he might even find out the truth of what had happened. He hummed softly under his breath.

At last! There were the next lines!

"Then the warden told me gently,
He seemed too young, too young to die,
We cut the rope and let him down—"

John J. Malone tried to remember the rhyme for "die." By, cry, lie, my and sigh. Then he let loose a few loud and indignant remarks about whoever had written that song, realized that he was entering the death house and stopped, embarrassed. That particular cell block always inspired him with the same behavior he would have shown at a high class funeral. He took off his hat and walked softly.

And at that moment hell broke loose. Two prisoners in the block began yelling like banshees. The alarms began to sound loudly, causing the outside siren to chime in with its hideous wail. Guards were running through the corridor, and John J. Malone instinctively ran with them toward the center of disturbance, the fourth cell on the left.

Before the little lawyer got there, one of the guards had the door open. Another guard cut quickly through the bright new rope from which the prisoner was dangling, and eased the limp body down to the floor.

The racket outside was almost deafening now, but John J. Malone scarcely heard it. The guard turned the body over, and

Malone recognized the very young and rather stupid face of Paul Palmer.

"He's hung himself," one of the guards said.

"With me for a lawyer?" Malone said angrily. "Hung himself—" He started to say "hell," then remembered he was in the presence of death.

"Hey," the other guard said excitedly. "He's alive. His neck's broke, but he's breathing a little."

Malone shoved the guard aside and knelt down beside the dying man. Paul Palmer's blue eyes opened slowly, with an expression of terrible bewilderment. His lips parted.

"It wouldn't break," Paul Palmer whispered. He seemed to recognize Malone, and stared at him, with a look of frightful urgency. *"It wouldn't break,"* he whispered to Malone. Then he died. . . .

"You're damned right I'm going to sit in on the investigation," Malone said angrily. He gave Warden Garrity's wastebasket a vicious kick. "The inefficient way you run your prison has done me out of a client." Out of a fat fee, too, he reminded himself miserably. He hadn't been paid yet, and now there would be a long tussle with the lawyer handling Paul Palmer's estate, who hadn't wanted him engaged for the defense in the first place. Malone felt in his pocket, found three crumpled bills and a small handful of change. He wished now that he hadn't got into that poker game last week.

The warden's dreary office was crowded. Malone looked around, recognized an assistant warden, the prison doctor—a handsome gray-haired man named Dickson—the guards from the death house, and the guard who had been ushering him in—Bowers was his name, Malone remembered, a tall, flat-faced, gangling man.

"Imagine him hanging himself," Bowers was saying incredulously. "Just after he found out he was gonna get a new trial."

Malone had been wondering the same thing. "Maybe he didn't get my wire," he suggested coldly.

"I gave it to him myself," Bowers stated positively. "Just last night. Never saw a man so happy in my life."

Dr. Dickson cleared his throat. Everyone turned to look at him.

"Poor Palmer was mentally unstable," the doctor said sadly. "You may recall I recommended, several days ago, that he be moved to the prison hospital. When I visited him last night he appeared hilariously—hysterically—happy. This morning, however, he was distinctly depressed."

"You mean the guy was nuts?" Warden Garrity asked hopefully.

"He was nothing of the sort," Malone said indignantly. Just let a hint get around that Paul

Palmer had been of unsound mind, and he'd never collect that five thousand dollar fee from the estate. "He was saner than anyone in this room, with the possible exception of myself."

Dr. Dickson shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't suggest that he was insane. I only meant he was subject to moods."

Malone wheeled to face the doctor. "Say. Were you in the habit of visiting Palmer in his cell a couple of times a day?"

"I was," the doctor said, nodding. "He was suffering from a serious nervous condition. It was necessary to administer sedatives from time to time."

Malone snorted. "You mean he was suffering from the effect of being sober for the first time since he was sixteen."

"Put it any way you like," Dr. Dickson said pleasantly. "You remember, too, that I had a certain personal interest."

"That's right," Malone said slowly. "He was going to marry your niece."

"No one was happier than I to hear about the new trial," the doctor said. He caught Malone's eye and added, "No, I wasn't fond enough of him to smuggle in a rope. Especially when he'd just been granted a chance to clear himself."

"Look here," Warden Garrity said irritably. "I can't sit around listening to all this stuff. I've got to report the result of an investigation. Where the hell did he get that rope?"

There was a little silence, and then one of the guards said, "Maybe from the guy who was let in to see him last night."

"What guy?" the warden snapped.

"Why—" The guard paused, confused. "He had an order from you admitting him. His name was La Cerra."

Malone felt a sudden tingling along his spine. Georgie La Cerra was one of Max Hook's boys. What possible connection could there be between Paul Palmer, socialite, and the big gambling boss?

Warden Garrity had recognized the name too. "Oh, yes," he said quickly. "That must have been it. But I doubt if we could prove it." He paused just an instant, and looked fixedly at Malone, as though daring him to speak. "The report will read that Paul Palmer obtained a rope, by means which have not yet been ascertained, and committed suicide while of unsound mind."

Malone opened his mouth and shut it again. He knew when he was licked. Temporarily licked, anyway. "For the love of mike," he said, "leave out the unsound mind."

"I'm afraid that's impossible," the warden said coldly.

Malone had kept his temper as long as he could. "All right," he said, "but I'll start an investiga-

tion that'll be a pip." He snorted. "Letting a gangster smuggle a rope in to a guy in the death house!" He glared at Dr. Dickson. "And you, foxy, with two escapes from the prison hospital in six months." He kicked the wastebasket again, this time sending it halfway across the room. "I'll show you from investigations! And I'm just the guy who can do it, too."

Dr. Dickson said quickly, "We'll substitute 'temporarily depressed' for the 'unsound mind.' "

But Malone was mad, now. He made one last, long comment regarding the warden's personal life and probably immoral origin, and slammed the door so hard when he went out that the steel engraving of Chester A. Arthur over the warden's desk shattered to the floor.

"Mr. Malone," Bowers said in a low voice as they went down the hall, "I searched the cell, after they took the body out. Whoever smuggled in that rope smuggled in a letter, too. I found it hid in his mattress, and it wasn't there yesterday, because the mattress was changed." He paused, and added, "And the rope couldn't of been there last night either, because there was no place he could of hid it."

Malone glanced at the envelope the guard held out to him—pale gray expensive stationery, with "Paul Palmer" written across the front of it in delicate, curving handwriting.

"I haven't any money with me," the lawyer said.

Bowers shook his head. "I don't want no dough. But there's gonna be an assistant warden's job open in about three weeks."

"You'll get it," Malone said. He took the envelope and stuffed it in an inside pocket. Then he paused, frowned, and finally added, "And keep your eyes open and your mouth shut. Because there's going to be an awful stink when I prove Paul Palmer was murdered. . . ."

The pretty, black-haired girl in Malone's anteroom looked up as he opened the door. "Oh, Mr. Malone," she said quickly. "I read about it in the paper. I'm so sorry."

"Never mind, Maggie," the lawyer said. "No use crying over spilled clients." He went into his private office and shut the door.

Fate was treating him very shabbily, evidently from some obscure motive of personal spite. He'd been counting heavily on that five thousand buck fee.

He took a bottle of rye out of the filing cabinet marked "Personal," poured himself a drink, noted that there was only one more left in the bottle, and stretched out on the worn red leather davenport to think things over.

Paul Palmer had been an amia-

ble, stupid young drunk of good family, whose inherited wealth had been held in trust for him by an uncle considered to be the stingiest man in Chicago. The money was to be turned over to him on his thirtieth birthday—some five years off—or on the death of the uncle, Carter Brown. Silly arrangement, Malone reflected, but rich men's lawyers were always doing silly things.

Uncle Carter had cramped the young man's style considerably, but he'd managed pretty well. Then he'd met Madelaine Starr.

Malone lit a cigar and stared dreamily through the smoke. The Starrs were definitely social, but without money. A good keen eye for graft, too. Madelaine's uncle was probably making a very good thing out of that political appointment as prison doctor.

Malone sighed, wished he weren't a lawyer, and thought about Madelaine Starr. An orphan, with a tiny income which she augmented by modeling in an exclusive dress shop—a fashionable and acceptable way of making a living. She had expensive tastes. (The little lawyer could spot expensive tastes in girls a mile away.)

She'd had to be damned poor to want to marry Palmer, Malone reflected, and damned beautiful to get him. Well, she was both.

But there had been another girl, one who had to be paid off. Lillian Claire by name, and a very lovely hunk of girl, too. Lovely, and smart enough to demand a sizable piece of money for letting the Starr-Palmer nuptials go through without a scandalous fuss.

Malone shook his head sadly. It had looked bad at the trial. Paul Palmer had taken his bride-to-be night-clubbing, delivering her back to her kitchenette apartment just before twelve. He'd been a shade high, then, and by the time he'd stopped off at three or four bars, he was several shades higher. Then he'd paid a visit to Lillian Claire, who claimed later at the trial that he'd attempted — unsuccessfully — to talk her out of the large piece of cash money, and had drunk up all the whiskey in the house. She'd put him in a cab and sent him home.

No one knew just when Paul Palmer had arrived at the big, gloomy apartment he shared with Carter Brown. The manservant had the night off. It was the manservant who discovered, next morning, that Uncle Carter had been shot neatly through the forehead with Paul Palmer's gun, and that Paul Palmer had climbed into his own bed, fully dressed, and was snoring drunk.

Everything had been against him, Malone reflected sadly. Not only had the jury been composed of hard-working, poverty stricken men who liked nothing better than to convict a rich young

wastrel of murder, but worse still, they'd all been too honest to be bribed. The trial had been his most notable failure. And now, this.

But Paul Palmer would never have hanged himself. Malone was sure of it. He'd never lost hope. And now, especially, when a new trial had been granted, he'd have wanted to live.

It had been murder. But how had it been done?

Malone sat up, stretched, reached in his pocket for the pale gray envelope Bowers had given him, and read the note through again.

My dearest Paul:

I'm getting this note to you this way because I'm in terrible trouble and danger. I need you—no one else can help me. I know there's to be a new trial, but even another week may be too late. Isn't there any way?

Your own

M.

"M.", Malone decided, would be Madelaine Starr. She'd use that kind of pale gray paper, too.

He looked at the note and frowned. If Madelaine Starr had smuggled that note to her lover, would she have smuggled in a rope by the same messenger? Or had someone else brought in the rope?

There were three people he wanted to see. Madelaine Starr was one. Lillian Claire was the second. And Max Hook was the third.

He went out into the anteroom, stopped halfway across it and said aloud, "But it's a physical impossibility. If someone smuggled that rope into Paul Palmer's cell and then Palmer hanged himself, it isn't murder. But it must have been murder." He stared at Maggie without seeing her. "Damn it, though, no one could have got into Paul Palmer's cell and hanged him."

Maggie looked at him sympathetically, familiar from long experience with her employer's processes of thought. "Keep on thinking and it'll come to you."

"Maggie, have you got any money?"

"I have ten dollars, but you can't borrow it. Besides, you haven't paid my last week's salary yet."

The little lawyer muttered something about ungrateful and heartless wenches, and flung himself out of the office.

Something had to be done about ready cash. He ran his mind over a list of prospective lenders. The only possibility was Max Hook. No, the last time he'd borrowed money from the Hook, he'd got into no end of trouble. Besides, he was going to ask another kind of favor from the gambling boss.

Malone went down Washington street, turned the corner,

went into Joe the Angel's City Hall Bar, and cornered its proprietor at the far end of the room.

"Cash a hundred dollar check for me, and hold it until a week from,"—Malone made a rapid mental calculation—"Thursday?"

"Sure," Joe the Angel said. "Happy to do you a favor." He got out ten ten-dollar bills while Malone wrote the check. "Want I should take your bar bill out of this?"

Malone shook his head. "I'll pay next week. And add a double rye to it."

As he set down the empty glass, he heard the colored janitor's voice coming faintly from the back room.

"They hanged him for the thing you done,
You knew it was a sin,
You didn't know his heart could break—"

The voice stopped suddenly. For a moment Malone considered calling for the singer and asking to hear the whole thing, all the way through. No, there wasn't time for it now. Later, perhaps. He went out on the street, humming the tune.

What was it Paul Palmer had whispered in that last moment? *"It wouldn't break!"* Malone scowled. He had a curious feeling that there was some connection betwen those words and the words of that damned song. Or was it his Irish imagination, tripping him up again? *"You didn't know his heart could break."* But it was Paul Palmer's neck that had been broken.

Malone hailed a taxi and told the driver to take him to the swank Lake Shore Drive apartment-hotel where Max Hook lived.

The gambling boss was big in two ways. He took in a cut from every crooked gambling device in Cook County, and most of the honest ones. And he was a mountain of flesh, over six feet tall and three times too fat for his height. His pink head was completely bald and he had the expression of a pleased cherub.

His living room was a masterpiece of the gilt-and-brocade school of interior decoration, marred only by a huge, battle-scarred roll-top desk in one corner. Max Hook swung around from the desk to smile cordially at the lawyer.

"How delightful to see you! What will you have to drink?"

"Rye," Malone said, "and it's nice to see you too. Only this isn't exactly a social call."

He knew better, though, than to get down to business before the drinks had arrived. (Max Hook stuck to pink champagne.) That wasn't the way Max Hook liked to do things. But when the rye was down, and the gambling boss had lighted a slender, tinted (and, Malone suspected, per-

fumed) cigarette in a rose quartz holder, he plunged right in.

"I suppose you read in the papers about what happened to my client, Palmer," he said.

"I never read the papers," Max Hook told him, "but one of my boys informed me. Tragic, wasn't it?"

"Tragic is no name for it," Malone said bitterly. "He hadn't paid me a dime."

Max Hook's eyebrows lifted. "So?" Automatically he reached for the green metal box in the left-hand drawer. "How much do you need?"

"No, no," Malone said hastily, "that isn't it. I just want to know if one of your boys—Little Georgie La Cerra—smuggled the rope in to him. That's all."

Max Hook looked surprised, and a little hurt. "My dear Malone," he said at last, "why do you imagine he'd do such a thing?"

"For money," Malone said promptly, "if he did do it. I don't care, I just want to know."

"You can take my word for it," Max Hook said, "he did nothing of the kind. He did deliver a note from a certain young lady to Mr. Palmer, at my request—a bit of nuisance, too, getting hold of that admittance order signed by the warden. I assure you, though, there was no rope. I give you my word, and you know I'm an honest man."

"Well, I was just asking," Malone said. One thing about the big gangster, he always told the truth. If he said Little Georgie La Cerra hadn't smuggled in that rope, then Little Georgie hadn't. Nor was there any chance that Little Georgie had engaged in private enterprises on the side. As Max Hook often remarked, he liked to keep a careful watch on his boys. "One thing more, though," the lawyer said, "if you don't mind. Why did the young lady come to you to get her note delivered?"

Max Hook shrugged his enormous shoulders. "We have a certain—business connection. To be exact, she owes me a large sum of money. Like most extremely mercenary people she loves gambling, but she is not particularly lucky. When she told me that the only chance for that money to be paid was for the note to be delivered, naturally I obliged."

"Naturally," Malone agreed. "You didn't happen to know what was in the note, did you?"

Max Hook was shocked. "My dear Malone! You don't think I read other people's personal mail!"

No, Malone reflected, Max Hook probably didn't. And not having read the note, the big gambler probably wouldn't know what kind of "terrible trouble and danger" Madelaine Starr was in. He decided to ask, though, just to be on the safe side.

"Trouble?" Max Hook repeated after him. "No, outside of having her fiancé condemned to death, I don't know of any trouble she's in."

Malone shrugged his shoulders at the reproof, rose and walked to the door. Then he paused, suddenly. "Listen, Max. Do you know the words to a tune that goes like this?" He hummed a bit of it.

Max Hook frowned, then nodded. "Mmm—I know the tune. An entertainer at one of my places used to sing it." He thought hard, and finally came up with a few lines.

"He was leaning against the prison bars,
Dressed up in his new prison clothes—"

"Sorry," Max Hook said at last, "that's all I remember. I guess those two lines stuck in my head because they reminded me of the first time I was in jail."

Outside in the taxi, Malone sang the two lines over a couple of times. If he kept on, eventually he'd have the whole song. But Paul Palmer hadn't been leaning against the prison bars. He'd been hanging from the water pipe.

Damn, and double damn that song!

It was well past eight o'clock, and he'd had no dinner, but he didn't feel hungry. He had a grim suspicion that he wouldn't feel hungry until he'd settled this business. When the cab paused for the next red light, he flipped a coin to decide whether he'd call first on Madelaine Starr or Lillian Claire, and Madelaine won.

He stepped out of the cab in front of the small apartment building on Walton Place, paid the driver, and started across the sidewalk just as a tall, white-haired man emerged from the door. Malone recognized Orlo Featherstone, the lawyer handling Paul Palmer's estate, considered ducking out of sight, realized there wasn't time, and finally managed to look as pleased as he was surprised.

"I was just going to offer Miss Starr my condolences," he said.

"I'd leave her undisturbed, if I were you," Orlo Featherstone said coldly. He had only one conception of what a lawyer should be, and Malone wasn't anything like it. "I only called myself because I am, so to speak and in a sense, a second father to her."

If anyone else had said that, Malone thought, it would have called for an answer. From Orlo Featherstone, it sounded natural. He nodded sympathetically and said, "Tragic affair, wasn't it?"

Orlo Featherstone unbent at least half a degree. "Distinctly so. Personally, I cannot imagine Paul Palmer doing such a thing. When I visited him yesterday, he seemed quite cheerful and full of hope."

"You—visited him yesterday?"

Malone asked casually. He drew a cigar from his pocket and began unwrapping it with exquisite care.

"Yes," Featherstone said, "about the will. He had to sign it, you know. Fortunate for her," he indicated Madelaine Starr with a gesture toward the building, "that he did so. He left her everything, of course."

"Of course," Malone said. He lighted his cigar on the second try. "You don't think Paul Palmer could have been murdered, do you?"

"Murdered!" Orlo Featherstone repeated, as though it was an obscene word. "Absurd! No Palmer has ever been murdered."

Malone watched him climb into a shiny Cadillac, then started walking briskly toward State Street. The big limousine passed him just as he reached the corner, it turned north on State Street and stopped. Malone paused by the newsstand long enough to see Mr. Orlo Featherstone get out and cross the sidewalk to the corner drugstore. After a moment's thought he followed and paused at the cigar counter, from where he could see clearly into the adjacent telephone booth.

Orlo Featherstone, in the booth, consulted a little notebook. Then he took down the receiver, dropped a nickel in the slot, and began dialing. Malone watched carefully. D-E-L—9-6-0— It was Lillian Claire's number.

The little lawyer cursed all sound-proof phone booths, and headed for a bar on the opposite corner. He felt definitely unnerved.

After a double rye, and halfway through a second one, he came to the heartening conclusion that when he visited Lillian Claire, later in the evening, he'd be able to coax from her the reason why Orlo Featherstone, of all people, had telephoned her, just after leaving the late Paul Palmer's fiancée. A third rye braced him for his call on the fiancée herself.

Riding up in the self-service elevator to her apartment, another heartening thought came to him. If Madelaine Starr was going to inherit all the Palmer dough—then it might not be such a trick to collect five thousand bucks. He might even be able to collect it by a week from Thursday.

And he reminded himself, as she opened the door, this was going to be one time when he wouldn't be a sucker for a pretty face.

Madelaine Starr's apartment was tiny, but tasteful. Almost too tasteful, Malone thought. Everything in it was cheap, but perfectly correct and in exactly the right place, even to the Van Gogh print over the midget fireplace. Madelaine Starr was in exactly the right taste, too.

She was a tall girl, with a figure that still made Malone blink,

in spite of the times he'd admired it in the courtroom. Her bronze-brown hair was smooth and well-brushed, her pale face was calm and composed. Serene, polished, suave. Malone had a private idea that if he made a pass at her, she wouldn't scream. She was wearing black house-pajamas.

He wondered if they were her idea of mourning.

Malone got the necessary condolences and trite remarks out of the way fast, and then said, "What kind of terrible trouble and danger are you in, Miss Starr?"

That startled her. She wasn't able to come up with anything more original than "What do you mean?"

"I mean what you wrote in your note to Paul Palmer," the lawyer said.

She looked at the floor and said, "I hoped it had been destroyed."

"It will be," Malone said gallantly, "if you say so."

"Oh," she said. "Do you have it with you?"

"No," Malone lied. "It's in my office safe. But I'll go back there and burn it." He didn't add when.

"It really didn't have anything to do with his death, you know," she said.

Malone said, "Of course not. You didn't send him the rope too, did you?"

She stared at him. "How awful of you."

"I'm sorry," Malone said contritely.

She relaxed. "I'm sorry too. I didn't mean to snap at you. I'm a little unnerved, naturally." She paused. "May I offer you a drink?"

"You may," Malone said, "and I'll take it."

He watched her while she mixed a lot of scotch and a little soda in two glasses, wondering how soon after her fiancé's death he could safely ask her for a date. Maybe she wouldn't say Yes to a broken-down criminal lawyer, though. He took the drink, downed half of it, and said to himself indignantly, "Who's broken-down?"

"Oh, Mr. Malone," she breathed, "you don't believe my note had anything to do with it?"

"Of course not," Malone said. "That note would have made him want to live, and get out of jail." He considered bringing up the matter of his five thousand dollar fee, and then decided this was not the time. "Nice that you'll be able to pay back what you owe Max Hook. He's a bad man to owe money to."

She looked at him sharply and said nothing. Malone finished his drink, and walked to the door.

"One thing, though," he said, hand on the knob. "This—terrible trouble and danger you're in. You'd better tell me. Because

I might be able to help, you know."

"Oh, no," she said. She was standing very close to him and her perfume began to mingle dangerously with the rye and scotch in his brain. "I'm afraid not." He had a definite impression that she was thinking fast. "No one can help, now." She looked away, delicately. "You know—a girl—alone in the world—"

Malone felt his cheeks reddening. He opened the door and said, "Oh." Just plain Oh.

"Just a minute," she said quickly. "Why did you ask all these questions?"

"Because," Malone said, just as quickly, "I thought the answers might be useful—in case Paul Palmer was murdered."

That, he told himself, riding down the self-service elevator, would give her something to think about.

He hailed a cab and gave the address of the apartment building where Lillian Claire lived, on Goethe Street. In the lobby of the building he paused long enough to call a certain well-known politician at his home and make sure that he was there. It would be just as well not to run into that particular politician at Lillian Claire's apartment, since he was paying for it.

It was a nice apartment, too, Malone decided, as the slim mulatto maid ushered him in. Big, soft modernistic divans and chairs, paneled mirrors, and a built-in bar. Not half as nice, though, as Lillian Claire herself.

She was a cuddly little thing, small, and a bit on the plump side, with curly blonde hair and a deceptively simple stare. She said, "Oh, Mr. Malone. I've always wanted to get acquainted with you." Malone had a pleasant feeling that if he tickled her, just a little, she'd giggle.

She mixed him a drink, lighted his cigar, sat close to him on the biggest and most luxurious divan, and said, "Tell me, how on earth did Paul Palmer get that rope?"

"I don't know," Malone said. "Did you send it to him, baked in a cake?"

She looked at him reprovingly. "You don't think I wanted him to kill himself and let that awful woman inherit all that money?"

Malone said, "She isn't so awful. But this is tough on you, though. Now you'll never be able to sue him."

"I never intended to," she said. "I didn't want to be paid off. I just thought it might scare her away from him."

Malone put down his glass, she hopped up and refilled it. "Were you in love with him?" he said.

"Don't be silly." She curled up beside him again. "I liked him. He was much too nice to have someone like that marry him for his money."

Malone nodded slowly. The room was beginning to swim—

not unpleasantly — before his eyes. Maybe he should have eaten dinner after all.

"Just the same," he said, "you didn't think up that idea all by yourself. Someone put you up to asking for money."

She pulled away from him a little—not too much. "That's perfect nonsense," she said unconvincingly.

"All right," Malone said agreeably. "Tell me just one thing—"

"I'll tell you this one thing," she said. "Paul never murdered his uncle. I don't know who did, but it wasn't Paul. Because I took him home that night. He came to see me, yes. But I didn't put him in a cab and send him home. I took him home, and got him to his own room. Nobody saw me. It was late—almost daylight." She paused and lit a cigarette. "I peeked into his uncle's room to make sure I hadn't been seen, and his uncle was dead. I never told anybody because I didn't want to get messed up in it worse than I was already."

Malone sat bolt upright. "Fine thing," he said, indignantly and a bit thickly. "You could have alibied him and you let him be convicted."

"Why bother?" she said serenely. "I knew he had you for a lawyer. Why should he need an alibi?"

Malone shoved her back against the cushions of the davenport and glared at her. "A'right," he said. "But that wasn't the thing I was gonna ask. Why did old man Featherstone call you up tonight?"

Her shoulders stiffened under his hands. "He just asked me for a dinner date," she said.

"You're a liar," Malone said, not unpleasantly. He ran an experimental finger along her ribs. She did giggle. Then he kissed her. . . .

All this time spent, Malone told himself reprovingly, and you haven't learned one thing worth the effort. Paul Palmer hadn't killed his uncle. But he'd been sure of that all along, and anyway it wouldn't do any good now. Madelaine Starr needed money, and now she was going to inherit a lot of it. Orlo Featherstone was on friendly terms with Lillian Claire.

The little lawyer leaned his elbows on the table and rested his head on his hands. At three o'clock in the morning, Joe the Angel's was a desolate and almost deserted place. He knew now, definitely, that he should have eaten dinner. Nothing, he decided, would cure the way he felt except a quick drink, a long sleep, or sudden death.

He would probably never learn who had killed Paul Palmer's uncle, or why. He would probably never learn what had hap-

pened to Paul Palmer. After all, the man had hanged himself. No one else could have got into that cell. It wasn't murder to give a man enough rope to hang himself with.

No, he would probably never learn what had happened to Paul Palmer, and he probably would never collect that five thousand dollar fee. But there was one thing he could do. He'd learn the words of that song.

He called for a drink, the janitor, and the janitor's guitar. Then he sat back and listened.

"As I passed by the ol' state's prison,
Ridin' on a steam-line' train—"

It was a long rambling ballad, requiring two drinks for the janitor and two more for Malone. The lawyer listened, remembering a line here and there.

"When they hanged him in the mornin'
His last words were for you,
Then the sheriff took his shiny knife
An' cut that ol' rope through."

A sad story, Malone reflected, finishing the second drink. Personally, he'd have preferred "My Wild Irish Rose" right now. But he yelled to Joe for another drink and went on listening.

"They hanged him for the thing you done,
You knew it was a sin,
How well you knew his heart could break,
Lady, why did you turn him in—"

The little lawyer jumped to his feet. That was the line he'd been trying to remember! And what had Paul Palmer whispered? *"It wouldn't break."*

Malone knew, now.

He dived behind the bar, opened the cash drawer and scooped out a handful of telephone slugs.

"You're drunk," Joe the Angel said indignantly.

"That may be," Malone said happily, "and it's a good idea too. But I know what I'm doing."

He got one of the slugs into the phone on the third try, dialed Orlo Featherstone's number, and waited till the elderly lawyer got out of bed and answered the phone.

It took ten minutes, and several more phone slugs to convince Featherstone that it was necessary to get Madelaine Starr out of bed and make the three-hour drive to the state's prison, right now. It took another ten minutes to wake up Lillian Claire and induce her to join the party. Then he placed a long-distance call to the sheriff of Statesville County and invited him to drop in at the prison and pick up a murderer.

Malone strode to the door. As he reached it, Joe the Angel hailed him.

"I forgot," he said. "I got sumpin' for you." Joe the Angel rummaged back of the cash register and brought out a long envelope. "That cute secretary of yours was looking for you all over town to give you this. Finally she left it with me. She knew you'd get here sooner or later."

Malone said "Thanks," took the envelope, glanced at it, and winced. "First National Bank." Registered mail. He knew he was overdrawn, but—

Oh, well, maybe there was still a chance to get that five thousand bucks.

The drive to Statesville wasn't so bad, in spite of the fact that Orlo Featherstone snored most of the way. Lillian snuggled up against Malone's left shoulder like a kitten, and with his right hand he held Madelaine Starr's hand under the auto robe. But the arrival, a bit before seven A.M., was depressing. The prison looked its worst in the early morning, under a light fog.

Besides, the little lawyer wasn't happy over what he had to do.

Warden Garrity's office was even more depressing. There was the warden, eyeing Malone coldly and belligerently, and Madelaine Starr and her uncle, Dr. Dickson, looking a bit annoyed. Orlo Featherstone was frankly skeptical. The sheriff of Statesville county was sleepy and bored. Lillian Claire was sleepy and suspicious. Even the guard, Bowers, looked bewildered.

And all these people, Malone realized, were waiting for him to pull a rabbit out of his whiskers.

He pulled it out fast. "Paul Palmer was murdered," he said flatly.

Warden Garrity looked faintly amused "A bunch of pixies crawled into his cell and tied the rope around his neck?"

"No," Malone said, lighting a cigar. "This murderer made one try—murder by frame-up. He killed Paul Palmer's uncle for two reasons, one of them being to send Paul Palmer to the chair. It nearly worked. Then I got him a new trial. So another method had to be tried, fast, and that one did work."

"You're insane," Orlo Featherstone said, "Palmer hanged himself."

"I'm not insane," Malone said indignantly, "I'm drunk. There's a distinction. And Paul Palmer hanged himself because he thought he wouldn't die, and could escape from prison." He looked at Bowers and said, "Watch all these people, someone may make a move."

Lillian Claire said, "I don't get it."

"You will," Malone promised. He kept a watchful eye on Bowers and began talking fast. "The whole thing was arranged by

someone who was mercenary and owed money. Someone who knew Paul Palmer would be too drunk to know what had happened the night his uncle was killed, and who was close enough to him to have a key to the apartment. That person went in and killed the uncle with Paul Palmer's gun. And, as that person had planned, Paul Palmer was tried and convicted and would have been electrocuted, if he hadn't had a damn smart lawyer."

He flung his cigar into the cuspidor and went on. "Then Paul Palmer was granted a new trial. So the mercenary person who wanted Paul Palmer's death convinced him that he had to break out of prison, and another person showed him how the escape could be arranged—by pretending to hang himself, and being moved to the prison hospital—*watch her, Bowers!*"

Madelaine Starr had flung herself at Dr. Dickson. "Damn you," she screamed, her face white. "I knew you'd break down and talk. But you'll never talk again—"

There were three shots. One from the little gun Madelaine had carried in her pocket, and two from Bowers' service revolver.

Then the room was quite still.

Malone walked slowly across the room, looked down at the two bodies, and shook his head sadly. "Maybe it's just as well," he said. "They'd probably have hired another defense lawyer anyway."

"This is all very fine," the Statesville County sheriff said. "But I still don't see how you figured it. Have another beer?"

"Thanks," Malone said. "It was easy. A song tipped me off. Know this?" He hummed a few measures.

"Oh, sure," the sheriff said. "The name of it is, 'The Statesville Prison.'" He sang the first four verses.

"Well, I'll be double-damned," Malone said. The bartender put the two glasses of beer on the table. "Bring me a double gin for a chaser," the lawyer told him.

"Me too," the sheriff said. "What does the song have to do with it, Malone?"

Malone said, "It was the crank on the adding machine, pal. Know what I mean? You put down a lot of stuff to add up and nothing happens, and then somebody turns the crank and it all adds up to what you want to know. See how simple it is?"

"I don't," the sheriff said, "but go on."

"I had all the facts," Malone said, "I knew everything I wanted to know, but I couldn't add it up. I needed one thing, that one thing." He spoke almost reverently, downing his gin. "Paul Palmer said *'It wouldn't break'*—just before he died. And he looked terribly surprised. For a long time, I didn't know what he meant. Then I heard that song

again, and I did know." He sang a few lines. *"The sheriff took his shiny knife, and cut that ol' rope through."* Then he finished his beer, and sang on, *"They hanged him for the thing you done, you knew it was a sin. You didn't know his heart could break, Lady, why did you turn him in."* He ended on a blue note.

"Very pretty," the sheriff said. "Only I heard it, *'You knew that his poor heart could break.'* "

"Same thing." Malone said, waving a hand. "Only, that song was what turned the crank on the adding machine. When I heard it again, I knew what Palmer meant by *'it wouldn't break.'* "

"His heart?" the sheriff said helpfully.

"No," Malone said, "the rope."

He waved at the bartender and said "Two more of the same." Then to the sheriff, "He expected the rope to break. He thought it would be artfully frayed so that he would drop to the floor unharmed. Then he could have been moved to the prison hospital—from which there had been two escapes in the past six months. He had to escape, you see, because his sweetheart had written him that she was in terrible trouble and danger — the same sweetheart whose evidence had helped convict him at the trial.

"Madelaine Starr wanted his money," Malone went on, "but she didn't want Paul. So her murder of his uncle served two purposes. It released Paul's money, and it framed him. Using poor old innocent Orlo Featherstone, she planted in Lillian Claire's head the idea of holding up Paul for money, so Paul would be faced with a need for ready cash. Everything worked fine, until I gummixed up the whole works by getting my client a new trial."

"Your client shouldn't of had such a smart lawyer," the sheriff said, over his beer glass.

Malone tossed aside the compliment with a shrug of his cigar. "Maybe he should of had a better one. Anyway, she and her uncle, Dr. Dickson, fixed it all up. She sent that note to Paul, so he'd think he had to break out of the clink. Then her uncle, Dickson, told Paul he'd arrange the escape, with the rope trick. To the world, it would have looked as though Paul Palmer had committed suicide in a fit of depression. Only he did have a good lawyer, and he lived long enough to say *'It wouldn't break.'* "

Malone looked into his empty glass and lapsed into a melancholy silence.

The phone rang—someone hijacked a truck over on Springfield Road—and the sheriff was called away. Left by himself, Malone cried a little into his beer. Lillian Claire had gone back to Chicago with Orlo Featherstone, who really had called her up for a date, and no other reason.

Malone reminded himself he hadn't had any sleep, his head was splitting, and what was left of Joe the Angel's hundred dollars would just take him back to Chicago. And there was that letter from the bank, probably threatening a summons. He took it out of his pocket and sighed as he tore it open.

"Might as well face realities," Malone said to the bartender. "And bring me another double gin."

He drank the gin, tore open the envelope, and took out a certified check for five thousand dollars, with a note from the bank to the effect that Paul Palmer had directed its payment. It was dated the day before his death.

Malone waltzed to the door, waltzed back to pay the bartender and kiss him bood-bye.

"Do you feel all right?" the bartender asked anxiously.

"All right?" Malone said. "I'm a new man!"

What was more, he'd just remembered the rest of that song. He sang it, happily, as he went up the street toward the railroad station.

"As I passed by the ol' state's prison,
Ridin' on a streamline' train,
I waved my hand, and said out loud,
I'm never comin' back again,
I'm never comin' back
a—gain!"

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO GENERAL SEROV?

SHORTLY BEFORE it was reported in this country that General Ivan Serov, former Soviet Secret Police Chief, had been put in charge of police arrangements concerning Berlin, a dispatch in a London weekly, quoting the usual "diplomatic sources in Germany," said he had been appointed head of an organization to protect Soviet rocket and atomic secrets and to spy on similar developments in the West. Serov had of course been professionally interested in this subject previously. The new organization was understood to be operating under Serov's direction as a part of Soviet military intelligence—"but with special privileges." Readers of A. M. Biew's KAPITSA (Frederick Muller, London) will recall the implication of the phrase "special privileges."...

second spring

by . . . Theodore Mathieson

There was no explanation for the murders—why she'd done it — not until he talked to Maud, just before the trial.

MAUD GULLICK was only eighteen on the spring morning in 1932, when she bludgeoned her mother and father to death over their breakfast.

According to the police report, Maud had calmly gone down to her father's basement workshop —the Gullicks lived at the top of a set of three flats in the San Francisco Richmond District — had picked up one of her father's hammers, and carried it back up, concealed under her bathrobe. Entering the kitchen, she called the attention of her parents to a roofing operation going on across the street. She hit her father first at the base of the skull, then her mother in the left temple. One blow was sufficient for each, for Maud was a big girl, six feet one, and weighed almost two hundred pounds. Afterwards she called the police, but by the time they arrived, she had lost control of herself, and they could make little of her story. Later she refused to tell them anything.

Neighbors had given the police some information, but not enough to explain the murders. Old Man Gullick was in his fif-

---

Theodore Mathieson has been working with words most of his life, in categories as diverse as writing advertising copy and directing summer theater, teaching English and writing radio plays. Now retired from teaching, he lives in picturesque Grass Valley, in California, in the Mother Lode country.

ties, a carpenter by trade, who'd been out of work most of the winter. He'd been married before, and Maud was the child of his first wife, now dead. The second Mrs. Gullick was ten or twelve years younger than Gullick, but didn't look it. A small, perpetually harried bird type, with a malicious tongue, she talked incessantly against her stepdaughter.

"Maud's as lazy and stubborn as a jackass," Mrs. Gullick used to say in the interims when she and her neighbors were on speaking terms. "Been tryin' to get her to go to business school after she graduates from high school, so she can get a decent job and support herself. It isn't as if she's goin' to attract the men, looking the way she does. But she won't listen. Just shrugs those big humpy shoulders of hers, and then goes on mooning over the movies and listening to those crazy records of hers."

Neighbors living directly under the Gullicks reported that they would hear screams and thumps now and then from overhead, but they could never make out what the fuss was about. They'd seen Maud going off to school occasionally with suspicious welts across her cheek, and once with a blackened eye.

Maud had a black eye the day the police jailed her for the murders.

When Joe Barnes, my city editor, heard about the black eye, he shook his finger at me and said: "Every other paper in town is calling the Gullick kid an unnatural monster. Just to be different, Caxton, I'm assigning you to uncover a little justification for slugging her old man and old lady. You can't miss. You can always fall back on mental incompetence. By the look of her photograph, I'd say that might be your best bet. But see what you can pick up."

Barnes was right. Maud's photograph was just a pale image of the unprepossessing original which I visited on her second day in jail. Her face looked small, set on that tremendous hulk of a body, and her pallid skin had a middle-aged, pouchy look. On the other hand, her hands and feet were small and feminine.

"Miss Gullick," I said politely, "I am a reporter from the *Express*. My editor sent me over to see if there isn't anything we can do to help you."

Maud looked at me sharply for a moment, then blinked as tears came to her eyes. I imagined the police and other reporters had given her a hard time; she didn't have much to charm them with.

"How do you mean—help?" she asked. "After what I've done?"

"Well, you must have had a very strong reason for doing what you did," I said. "Maybe if we knew what it was, and could tell

the people, it would be easier for you later—at the trial."

"My father beat me. Often," she said after a pause.

"He gave you that black eye?"

"Yes."

"And is that why you—?"

She shook her head, started biting her nails, which were already bitten to the quick.

"I think it would really help you to tell the truth."

Again tears appeared in her eyes. "If the others had asked me like that, I would have told them."

I waited patiently, and finally it came.

"Poppa broke my Victrola. Dropped it on the floor and smashed it. And then he took my Buzzy Bidell records and—and he put them in the stove. Oh, it was terrible. They turned all bubbly and melty, and I just—I couldn't help—"

"It was after he put your Buzzy Bidell records in the fire that you went down to the workshop?"

"Yes, after that—and after the things he said about Buzzy!"

It took a moment to get to me.

"You—like Buzzy Bidell?"

Maud's eyes which a moment before had been a drab and hopeless gray began to soften and glow, transforming her face from the middle-aged look to one of rapt youthfulness.

"Oh, yes, I think Buzzy's real keen. There's never been anybody like him. When he sings I just get beside myself. I've seen every movie he ever made, and I have —had—all his records. But the police lady says she's going to get me another victrola and some of Buzzy's brand new records—and, Mr. Reporter—could you take another picture of me for your paper?"

"I think it could be arranged. Why?"

"Well, I didn't like the ones they took when I first got here. I was upset, and well, maybe if you took another it would turn out better. I know I'm not pretty, but —who knows? *He* may even see it, and—"

"Who?"

"Why, Buzzy Bidell. After all, if my picture appears again in the paper, and he sees it, he might get interested in me, *and even come to see me.*" In a sudden rush of conspiratorial enthusiasm, Maud put her hand under the pillow on her cot and brought out a small brown pencil tablet.

"I'm keeping a daily diary of everything that happens to me here," she said in a whisper. "When I think I've got enough to interest Buzzy, I'm going to send it to him. He might really get interested in me then. Just to *talk* to him would make me feel so much better about *everything.*"

"Could you let me—read your diary?

"Oh, no—nobody but Buzzy will ever read this."

"I see." Then a thought struck

me. "Have you ever kept a diary before, Miss Gullick?"

"Oh, yes. I've kept one for the past year. It's home in my bureau drawer. I didn't get a chance to take it with me."

A sergeant came shortly after that and showed me out. I think word had got around that Maud had spilled a good deal more to me than she had to the police, because on the way out I was detoured into Brown of homicide.

"What did you find out?" he asked.

"Exactly what you'll find out if you'll treat her nice." I said it several times in several different ways.

Brown didn't like it, but he had to let me go.

The Gullick flat was on Tenth Avenue, just off Lake. You'd think the tenants in the downstairs flats would have seen enough going and coming in the last couple of days to last them for a while, but no; there were tremors at front door curtains of both flats as I went upstairs. I didn't have to be sneaky about it, either; my editor, Barnes, had arranged to get me a key from the downtown realtors.

As I closed the door firmly behind me, making sure the lock was set, the first thing I smelled was stale bacon. From that fatal breakfast? The shades were drawn on the solidly conventional furnishings in the front room; I glanced in at the kitchen and saw that somebody had cleaned up. At least the dishes were off the table, and there were no stains around that I could see. Maybe hammer victims didn't bleed much.

It wasn't difficult to find Maud's room; it was the one with the walls covered with glossy photos of Buzzy Bidell, and pieces of sheet music of songs he'd made popular. Maud was obviously a jig-saw puzzle fan, too, because a shelf by her day bed was filled with them. I saw one labeled *Down Lover's Lane,* another *Moonlight on the Swanee,* a third *Buzzy Bidell at the Piano.* A pile of movie magazines lay under the bed, and near a window stood a tabouret whose dust traces told me it once held Maud's phonograph.

Maud's diary was in the bottom drawer of her bureau, as she said, under some well-worn nightwear. It was the size of a cook book and half as thick, with red, simulated-leather binding generously covered with greasy smudges. Maud was clearly a messy eater.

I opened the book at random, and read:

"*February 2nd.* I just found out that Buzzy's birthday and mine are the same! April 22nd! Just think—somewhere I've read that astrologists consider people born on the same date as having a natural affinity for one another.

As if I didn't know that already! I wish Buzzy knew it. I wish just that he knew I was alive."

I skipped a few pages and read:

"*March 1st.* The Junior Ball is tonight. Those high school boys are too green for me. I'll take a bath, go to bed early, read my magazines, and listen to my records . . .

"*March 15th.* Went to see Buzzy in LOVE ME TONIGHT at the Lyric. My God, he's *handsome!* There were times I just had to close my eyes because I couldn't stand the sweet pain of looking at him. There was a girl sitting next to me who started laughing right in the middle of one of Buzzy's songs, and I hit her in the ribs as hard as I could with my elbow. She yelled and the usher came, but I said I had the jerks. I said I had them often, so the girl moved, and I was glad. I can't stand these snotty people who pretend they don't like Buzzy Bidell.

"*March 22nd.* I just had the most wonderful idea! I learned from the last issue of SILVER SCREEN, that Buzzy collects novelty tie clips. I saw one at Bascom's last night. It's only $1.98 and it's a treble clef. I'll have engraved on the back of it—from Maud to Buzzy. I wonder how much they'll charge?

"*April 19th.* I sent the tie clip off tonight. I was so thrilled putting the package in the mailbox; it was just like slipping it into Buzzy's own hand! Of course I don't expect any answer. But wouldn't it be wonderful if he sent me a post card or a signed photograph?

"*April 30th.* Gladys has been nagging me all week about signing up for secretarial school after graduation. She said a lot of pukey things about my looks, but I know. She's just jealous because I'm younger than her. I just don't listen to her. (I know things she don't even guess about—about Buzzy and me and what *could* happen!) Gladys is even mean about Buzzy. Says she can't stand him, because she knows it makes me mad. Mad! My God, I could kill the people who don't know enough to like Buzzy. It's worse than saying they don't like *me—I just can't stand it.*"

I'd read enough. I hid the book inside my overcoat under the arm, and pressing it close I went down the stairs past the twitching curtains and into the street.

The defense used that Diary, and I think it saved Maud's life. That, and my articles based on it. Public opinion had been against her at first, because she was not as frank with the police or with her lawyer about her motive for killing her parents as she was with me. It wasn't that our birthdays coincided, either—mine is in June—but the fact that I always treated her gently and with

a certain amount of respect as an individual. I don't think she ever had had much of that. I'm certain that nobody ever called her Miss Gullick before. She was used to insults and black eyes, of course; she had plenty of *those.*

But when Curry, her attorney, read selections from her diary at her sanity trial, she listened with tears running down her cheeks, and I could see the jury beginning to get thoughtful. After a protracted out-session, they recommended commitment, and Maud's future seemed settled.

I got a last interview with Maud while she was on her way to Napa, the state asylum. Crossing the ferry to Vallejo she sat between two plainclothesmen, and I sat opposite, my knees almost touching hers. We sat upstairs in the middle of the boat, although Maud had wanted to sit up front, outside. Her guards weren't going to have her jumping overboard before they got her to the asylum. I'm sure now she didn't have the faintest intention of doing so.

"Don't look so glum, Maud," I said softly, patting her hand. "Life in Napa won't be so bad. It's not like prison, you know. It's a beautiful place, and you'll be allowed a good deal of liberty."

Maud glanced sadly through the ferry boat windows at the tawney, bare hills of Richmond and the Carquinez straits.

"It's fall now. Come spring again, I won't be free. I won't be free ever again."

From her expression I knew she was thinking of Buzzy Bidell. That girl didn't give up easily.

"Well, you've got the radio, and records," I said. "Your little world isn't shut away from you."

She suddenly burst into tears. It was a while before she quieted down.

"He didn't send me a single word," she said finally. "Even though he must have known I did it only for him!"

Six months later, Maud Gullick walked out of Napa State Hospital and disappeared as completely as if she'd never been. For over twenty-five years no trace of her was found.

I was one of the first to hear of her again.

It was April, 1957. Now literary editor for the *Los Angeles Gazette,* I was taking a much needed rest at Las Vegas, and sitting one evening in the Nevada Room watching a frenetic floor show, I was approached by a waiter who bent over and whispered in my ear.

"There is a gentleman who would like a word with you," he said. "He would like to join you at your table."

"Who is he?" I asked.

"His name is Bidell, sir. Buzzy Bidell."

For a moment the name stirred memories dully, then suddenly remembrance exploded like a big one on the Fourth of July. "Tell him to come over," I said.

Bidell could only have been in his late forties, but he looked sixty, with lines of dissipation scoring his eyes and mouth. Even his voice sounded old and tired.

"Mr. Caxton," he said, sitting down at my invitation. "They told me you were here—my friends. You see, I work at a night club down the street, the *Adobe*. You must come and catch my show."

"If I have time, I certainly will," I said, and asked Bidell to join me in a drink. He seemed pathetically grateful and ordered a Scotch.

"You see," he said, "I've been —out of show business the past few years. My voice went back on me there for a while, but now I'm in great shape again." I knew he'd taken the cure several times, and I doubted if his voice was in great shape again. "I'm making quite a serious come-back, you know, Mr. Caxton. Even have written a book. Van Fleet is publishing it. Expecting the galley proofs any time now—tells about my road back."

I saw the light.

"I always enjoy reading books on comebacks," I said truthfully. "I'll look forward with pleasure to reading yours, Mr. Bidell."

"Oh, that'll be real George! I certainly would appreciate a favorable reading. Make a big difference, you know, to my future." He made a facile, juvenile gesture with his hands, and tried to flush youth back into his raddled features with a boyish smile. The attempt was pitiful.

"The finest experience has been to find that they haven't forgotten me—all those hundreds of thousands of fans of a few years ago.

"I still get letters from them. Look." He dug his hand into his coat pocket and brought up a fistful of envelopes, some of them suspiciously yellowed around the edges.

"Twenty-five years," he said, "and they haven't forgotten me. And here—" drawing one letter from an inside pocket. It looked new. "Got this one just the other day. Let me read it to you. 'Dear Mr. Bidell: This is the first letter I have written to you in a long, long time. I cannot say that I've thought of you often, just now and then, in a sweet, distant way. But now I have been thinking of you more lately. I cannot tell why. Perhaps it is because I heard you on the radio the other night and it brought back memories. Your voice still sounds wonderful to me. I have been buying all the reissues of your old records, too. Then I heard you were publishing a book about yourself. I certainly will be one of the first to read it. And I sometimes wonder if in

this book you will ever mention the names of some of the girls who wrote to you years ago. I was one of them. I sent you birthday cards (your birthday is the same as mine!) and once I even sent you a birthday gift.

" 'But I think maybe I did more for you than *any* of the others; if you could only know about this, maybe you would put me in your book, as part of your life. But I cannot tell you what I did except to say—I did it only for you.

" 'Please, dear Mr. Bidell, dedicate one of your songs to me there in your club in Las Vegas some night. I won't hear it, I know, because you don't broadcast like you used to, but it'll make me happy just thinking about it.

" 'The kindest, best, and most loving wishes . . .' "

Bidell looked up, his eyes revealing the charge which reading the letter aloud had given him.

"How did she sign it?" I asked, trying to keep my voice casual.

"Maud Milham, Roswell, New Mexico."

"When was it written?"

"I got it about a month ago. It's not dated."

I left then, after promising Bidell I would review his autobiography. In my hotel room I walked up and down for a long while, feeling for the first time in years the solar plexal excitement which the uncovering of a big lead always gave me. To find the whereabouts of the long-missing Maud Gullick! What a story that would make! I had the better part of a week to myself; I had planned to go north to Salt Lake City, to visit a former newspaper buddy; but it would be just as easy to head for Roswell.

I went out then and started looking up bus schedules.

I determined later that it was around the time I caught the bus south to Kingman, Arizona, at eleven fifteen the next morning, that Maud Gullick or Milham, as she signed herself now, was entering Doctor Eberle's office in Roswell.

Eberle, a wizened dapper little man with a memory like a tape recorder, showed Maud into his office and sat down behind his desk. It was the first time he had seen her, and he told me he was impressed with her buxom, matronly size, the pallor of her skin and her petulant, self-pitying expression.

"What can I do for you, Mrs. —ah" he glanced at the card the nurse had had her fill in—"Milham?"

Maud's voice was sullen. "My husband—he made me come. He's waiting downstairs. I—well, I haven't been acting myself, he says, for about five or six months and he insisted that I see a doctor."

"I see," Dr. Eberle said briskly. "What seems to be the trouble?"

"I'm—restless, and can't seem to sit still. I cry a lot. That makes Buck mad and he—he—" She began to sniffle.

"Well, now suppose we begin at the beginning. How long have you been married?"

"Seventeen years. Buck and I have gotten along very well, until lately."

"Any children?"

"Two. A boy and a girl."

"Ages?"

"The girl is thirteen, the boy sixteen."

"Do you all get on well together?"

"We always have. I guess I haven't been myself lately."

"What exactly do you do that annoys your husband?"

"He says I just don't seem to keep my mind on things. Like getting supper or — things like that. It's just that living by the clock doesn't seem important. I can't see that it is, doctor; so long as a person is happy—"

"Are you happy then?"

"If they'd just leave me alone, I would be."

"What do you think about when you let time slip through your fingers, so to speak?"

"Oh, I have a lot to think about!" Doctor Eberle noticed that as she spoke her expression cleared, her voice became younger and almost timid, like that of a girl's. "I read my magazines—"

"What sort of magazines?"

"Motion picture magazines."

"What else?"

"I—listen to my records."

"What kind of records?"

"Well, I've got a big collection of reissues of Buzzy Bidell's records." Maud looked at the doctor hopefully as she said this, as if she expected him to respond. He obliged.

"Bidell—Bidell—isn't he one of the old-style crooners?"

"He's not old-style!" Maud flared up, her eyes getting a wild look. "That's what Jack—my boy—is always saying. 'Mom and her crumby Bidell records!' " Her voice became sharp, vicious. "I slap him across the face for that, and then when Buck finds out about it, he hits *me*."

Doctor Eberle cleared his throat and looked thoughtfully down at the card.

"Well, Mrs. Milham," he said at last, "what you're going through is not uncommon. How old are you?"

"Forty-three."

"There, you see. Some women pass through this stage younger, some later, but all of them pass through it sometime. It's a time of great physical change, and along with it there are often emotional symptoms. What actually happens is that you have a sort of second adolescence; a resurgence of the old interests that held you when you were eighteen or nine-

teen. I imagine that Buzzy Bidell, for instance, was a great favorite of yours around that age."

"Yes—he was."

"Some women who were interested in dancing in their teens, and who have been good, steady wives for a quarter of a century, suddenly want to become ballerinas; or authors, or painters. It takes many forms. Some want to start another family. But this stage, fortunately, is temporary, and you will pass through it. I will write out a prescription for you, and you must take it faithfully. Come back and see me in about two weeks, and tell me how you're getting on."

I figured the whole time chart out later. I was waiting to change buses in Kingman when Buck Milham took Maud home after a visit to the pharmacist and stood watching in the kitchen while she poured a glass of water and pretended to take one of the capsules the doctor had prescribed. Actually, she told me, she never took one of them. The only reason for her refusal, so far as I can see, was that *she didn't want to be cured of her daydream.*

"And now for God's sake," Buck said after Maud apparently swallowed the capsule, "get that washing done this afternoon. You can't get in the back door, it's piled up so damned thick. Besides, I need some clean clothes, so my customers don't back away when I serve 'em. Do you hear? If that washing ain't done when I come home, I'll blacken your eye!"

Buck ran a bar in Roswell, and usually didn't open up until noon, so now he had his lunch of steak and french fries, which Maud cooked for him, and then he went to work. He usually had his suppers at the restaurant next to the bar, so he wouldn't get home until one or two the next morning.

First Maud went out to the back porch, where she looked drearily down at the dirty clothes and sighed. Then she piled the lunch dishes in the sink, and went upstairs to an attic storeroom which she had appropriated as a sort of extra bedroom for herself. There was an old cot close under the roof. Pictures cut from movie magazines were pasted against the bare board walls. A portable record player with three speeds occupied the place of honor under a dormer window.

Maud put a Buzzy Bidell forty-five on the turntable, and as the Voice filled the attic she sat down at an old drop-leaf sewing machine which she used for a desk and started writing in a wire-back tablet.

"Buck made me go to the doctor today," she wrote. "He's trying to get me to forget you again, Buzzy. Quiet is all I need, my dear, to imagine myself with you, but they will not let me have

it. There are times when Marcia and Jack come screaming up here demanding to play their terrible records on my phonograph when they have one of their own, and Buck never stops them. He seems to enjoy seeing me miserable. I can keep the kids out when he's not here, because I'm strong enough. But I'm not stronger than Buck.

"But I have done something that will keep them all out. I had our neighbor next door, Mr. Custer, who does odd-jobs, build me a strong door made of one-by-twelves, to put at the head of the stairs. He installed it yesterday, but I was clever enough not to ask him to put on the heavy bar to keep the others out. He thinks I just want it to keep the noise from coming up. He only charged me $7.50. I shall make the bar myself. So I can have the peace I want, dear Buzzy, and think of you as often as I wish . . ."

She turned off the record player, then, and went to work. She had her tools ready; the saw, the bit, the screwdriver, the hammer. She cut her bar from a two-by-four and bolted it to the door; to hold it firm when it was closed, she screwed a two-inch metal U-bar to the door frame. It took her a long time, because she was clumsy with the bit and the saw, and by the time she had finished and swept up the sawdust, she heard Marcia and Jack yelling in the back yard, on their way home from school. She heard the slam of the screen door and went downstairs at once. As usual, Jack, sullen and black-haired like his father, was the first to the bread and jam.

"I see you been layin' on your fat backside again," Jack said arrogantly, pointing to the washing. He always used expressions which he heard Buck use to her.

"Don't you talk like that, or I'll wash your mouth out with soap," Maud said.

"Oh, corn," Jack said, his cheeks stuffed with bread.

"Hi, mom," Marcia said. She was a small, skinny blonde girl with her father's razor-sharp features. "I'll bet you *have* been listenin' to your ancient ol' dreamboat again!"

"How long is this gonna keep up?" Jack asked. "Pretty soon, we'll have to be gettin' our own supper. Dad might just as well throw you out in the middle of the street, for all the good you are around here!"

"Just leave me *alone*!" Maud shouted and fled into the front room. The children followed her, leaving a trail of stickiness on wall and door.

"Why don't you listen to a real singer," Jack said and turned on a popular rock-and-roll record on his portable phonograph.

"Stop, stop!" Maud cried and ran for the stairs.

The children followed her.

Buck broke tradition by coming home to supper, possibly to check on whether the washing had been done. When Maud saw him coming, she fled to the attic and Jack met his father at the front door with: "She didn't do the washing, pop!"

Buck growled a swear word and tore up the stairs to the attic, only to thump his head hard in the dark against the closed wooden door. Then he began cursing in earnest.

"Shall I get the crow bar out in back, pop?"

"Why in the hell didn't you tell me she had put a door in here!" Buck yelled at him.

"You didn't give me time."

"Get me the crow bar!"

With the two children watching in anticipation, Buck beat the bar against the door, and pried and pried until it splintered open. Maud was cowering on the cot. Buck grabbed her roughly by the shoulders and practically dragged her down the stairs and into the kitchen.

"Now you're going to do that damned washing while I sit here and watch!" he yelled. The kids were delighted. This was better than T.V.

Maud began loading the washer as if she were doing it in her sleep while Buck made a running commentary on what he was going to do to her if she didn't pay attention to business from now on; how he was losing money right this minute, having to hire a man to take his place down at the bar; how she must be crazy hanging a useless door in the house without telling anybody.

Jack and Marcia watched their mother's somnambulistic activity until they got bored, then Jack poked his sister slyly and pointed upstairs. The children went quietly up to the attic and for a while picked curiously into the things. Finally Jack uncovered his mother's collection of records.

"This'll help Pop out," Jack said. "If she doesn't have all these records to play, she won't waste so much time, and might start doin' a little work around the place again."

Marcia nodded eagerly as Jack spread a newspaper on the floor and started breaking the records up into little bits and dropping them on the paper. Marcia helped too, and when they were finished, Jack picked up the paper and carried it like a sack downstairs and into the kitchen.

"Look, Pop," Jack said. "Now maybe mom won't spend so much time listenin' any more."

The boy threw the paper down with a clatter, and the shards of chitinous record poured out on the red linoleum.

"Good boy," Buck said, tousling his son's hair.

Maud stopped her washing then to look.

I got into Roswell around nine

the next morning, and the first thing I did was look up Milham in the phone book. There was only one. I got into a cab that was waiting at the station and gave him the Milham address.

It was only two or three blocks from the center of town, a two-story green frame house set on a flat, brownish lawn bordered by locust trees. I told the cab to wait as I went up the walk.

In a moment now I would know whether I had found Maud Gullick.

I knocked on the door and nobody answered. Three times, no answer. I walked along the verandah and tried to look in the windows, but the shades were drawn. I went back to the door and turned the knob. The door was unlocked, and I pushed and went inside. For a moment I could see nothing, except that I stood in a kind of hall with a stairway in front of me. There was somebody standing on the stairs.

"What in the hell do you want?"

A needle-faced character with a red face stood there in a beacon robe.

"Is this the home of Maud Milham?"

"This is my home—Buck Milham. What do you want?"

"Does Maud live here too?"

"Yeah, she's my wife."

"I'm—a friend of hers."

He looked at me as if he were considering throwing me out, then walked across the hall and flung open a door.

"G'wan in and sit down," he said. Then in a big voice he yelled upstairs. "Maud! Maud!"

As I went into the living room, I saw two children come curiously along the hall, a girl and a boy.

"Friend, you say? Where did you know Maud?" Buck had followed me into the room and stood by the door.

"San Francisco."

"Yeah? She never told me she was in Frisco."

"These your children?" I asked, to change the subject.

"Yeah. Boy's Jack, girl's Marcia. I didn't get your name."

"Caxton. I'm a newspaperman."

"Oh, yeah?" Buck became a fraction more amiable. "I run a bar here in town, the CACTUS, on Main Street. It's just a block from the bus station; a lot of newspaper guys drop in there. Oh, here, Maud. A friend to see you. Mr. Caxton."

I recognized Maud Gullick, all right. And she knew me the moment she saw me, because her face paled and she put her hand out against the door frame to support herself.

"Hello, Mr. Caxton," she said distantly.

"Hello, Maud," I said. "I'm surprised to see you married and with a family and all. How long have you been married?"

"Seventeen years."

All of a sudden a feeling came over me that I had no right coming here. The past was past. If Maud could go away quietly and get married and raise a family and live her own life for seventeen years, what right had I—

"You never told me you lived in Frisco," Buck said to his wife.

"I never liked to talk about that," she said almost primly.

"We knew each other only a short while," I said, rising. "I just happened to be alone in Roswell, and remembered—" I edged towards the door. "It's good to catch a glimpse of old acquaintances again, you know." Buck was eyeing me suspiciously.

"Maud lent me five bucks when I was down and out," I said, putting my hand in my pocket. "I thought after all these years, it's earned a little interest." I handed a ten dollar bill to Maud. Buck's suspicion cleared; he could understand that.

"That's all I wanted, just to clear my conscience," I said. I wanted to get out of there, away where I could think. Maud was eating me up with her eyes.

"Goodbye, Mr. Milham — good luck Maud. Nice children you've got there."

I got the front door open and looked back as Maud spoke.

"Mr. Caxton," she said. "They broke my door down."

"Did they?" I said and laughed uncomprehendingly. "Well, have your husband buy you a new one!"

Buck laughed and the children laughed this time, and I left. I was glad I'd had the cab waiting. I told the driver to take me back to the bus station.

Now that I had found Maud Gullick living, it seemed, so normally, I didn't want to inform the authorities; I just wanted to keep hands off. At the same time, I wanted more time to think about it.

I bought a ticket to Lincoln, up in the mountains. I'd always wanted to see the territory Billy the Kid had battled around in, and I thought a couple of nights away from Roswell, but not too far from it, would clear my mind and I'd know what to do.

I spent a day seeing the jail where they locked up the Kid; I saw the bullet holes in the wall where the Kid shot at the Warden. I visited the Mascalero Indian Reservation, and that night at the hotel I couldn't go to sleep. Her last words to me went round and round in my mind: "They broke my door down—they broke my door down." It was like a discord in a piece of music that sounded pretty good otherwise.

The next day I took a bus back to Roswell. I got the full blow as I came out into the afternoon sunlight and saw the newspaper in the stands: WOMAN KILLS HUSBAND, TWO CHILDREN. Their pictures were on the front page, and I had no

trouble recognizing them. In a daze I went to the nearest bar. I couldn't understand why the place should be locked up until I looked up and saw the painted lettering on the door: THE CACTUS.

I went over into the plaza in front of the court house and sat down and read the paper with a mind that didn't take in much.

Only one fact I got quite clear. Maud had used a hammer again.

When I got hold on myself, I went over to the jail where they were keeping Maud. I showed my press card, but they wouldn't let me in. She was too hot. I wired my editor in L. A. and told him to do what he could, that I'd be sleeping for the next forty-eight hours on the police blotter, and if he swung it, I'd give him a story that would scoop every other paper in the country. Somehow he did it, and the next morning they let me in to see her for five minutes.

Five minutes were enough.

"It was you," she said. "You helped me do it. They broke my door down. There was no place for me to go. And then you came and reminded me. On the ferry boat, remember? You said the hospital wouldn't be bad, that I'd be quiet and free. And I was. And now I want to go back where I can be alone with Buzzy and they won't break my door down."

I had my story.

NEXT MONTH—

G. K. Chesterton's THE CHIEF MOURNER OF MARNE

Robert Bloch's THE MAN WHO KNEW WOMEN

Stuart Palmer's RIDDLE OF THE TIRED BULLET

Evan Hunter's A VERY SMALL HOMICIDE

Leslie Charteris' THE PERFECT CRIME

and

ICE COLD MURDER

A NEW NOVELET by LAWRENCE TREAT

—in THE SAINT MYSTERY MAGAZINE

the murder of scented flower

by . . . Wenzell Brown

Chinatown in 1909—in the days when the flags of war billowed out from the roofs of both Tong headquarters.

NO ONE seeing Scented Flower* playing in the teeming streets about the docks of Canton would have thought that this neglected child would, in a few years, be the key figure in international mediation or that her death would spark one of the bloodiest tong wars in history. Scented Flower's mother was one of several wives of a coolie dock-laborer. Until Scented Flower was eight she knew no other home than the open streets and a single, crowded cellar room on the banks of the Pearl River. Then according to the customs of impoverished Chinese families she was bartered off as a child bride.

Under ordinary circumstances Scented Flower would have entered a Chinese household quite similar to that which she had left and no more would have been heard from her. But by a quirk of fate, the child fell into the hands

* The Chinese names used here are attempts to phoneticize Chinese characters. Magazine and newspaper accounts give as many as seven variants for some of the names. Similarly Scented Flower is a translation from the Chinese and other variants such as Fragrant Flower, Sweet Blossom and Sweet-smelling Flower have been used in different records of the Tong wars.

Wenzell Brown was teaching in China when the War began. Later author of HONG KONG AFTERMATH *(Smith & Durrell), he has written more than 20 books and novels, about Caribbean affairs (*DYNAMITE ON OUR DOORSTEP*), juvenile delinquency (*TEEN AGE TERROR, THE WICKED STREETS, PRISON GIRL, *etc.).*

of a merchant who was supplying brides to the large male community of Chinese which had grown up in America. Within a few months she was travelling in the hold of an ancient freighter to San Francisco at which point she was smuggled into the United States. Even so she might have disappeared into the labyrinth of San Francisco's Chinatown had she not come under the patronage of one of the most notorious Chinese gangsters of the day, a man who bore the "amusing" name of Mock Duck.

Mock Duck did not look like a thug. His appearance was almost as absurd at his name. He was short and plump with a round, bland face and slanted eyes. When talking with Americans he spoke exaggerated pidgin English and used comical gestures to emphasize his points. But Mock Duck was a fighter without fear. Later, during the tong wars in New York, he distinguished himself repeatedly by leading his fighters into the middle of Doyer Street where he would squat on his haunches, close his eyes and fire in the general direction of his enemies until he had emptied the two pistols which he carried with him into battle.

Actually Scented Flower was not the property of Mock Duck but was purchased by one of his minor henchmen, Lo Hee Dong, with whom she lived for a little over three years. Then Lo was arrested. The officers who took him into custody found him in a room with several other Chinese all of whom were in a state of drug-induced torpor. Scented Flower was lying on a filthy pallet beside his cot. The indignant officers demanded proof of marriage from Lo and, when he could produce no marriage certificate, they carted him off to prison while Scented Flower was placed in a Christian mission on the outskirts of San Francisco.

Meanwhile Mock Duck had left California for the greater opportunities of New York. When he arrived in Chatham Square he learned that all gambling in the district was in the hands of the On Leong Tong headed by Chinatown's unofficial mayor, Tom Lee. Sporadic attempts had been made by other Chinese to wrest part of the gambling revenue away from Lee, but the On Leong hatchetmen had made short shrift of the upstarts. Mock Duck set about to remedy this situation. At first Tom Lee was scornful of the moon-faced little man who sought to usurp his power. But Mock Duck's henchmen began drifting in from San Francisco and, to add to his strength, he formed an alliance with a small but ferocious tong known as the Four Brothers. Within a year of his arrival in New York, Mock Duck was prepared to wage open battle with the On Leong Tong.

Chinatown forms a tiny irregu-

lar triangle in the heart of lower Manhattan. Mott and Pell Streets form two sides of the triangle, while Doyers branches out of Pell and wends a crooked way to Chatham Square. The headquarters of Tom Lee were on Mott Street, while Mock Duck and his Hip Sing Tong had rooms in Pell. Doyers Street soon became a sort of no-man's land where members of the rival tongs, concealed by the sharp angles of the street, waited to assassinate one another with guns, hatchets and snickersnees. After a few such murders had taken place, tong members no longer walked the street singly but moved about in gangs of six or more.

The skirmishes increased in size until they became full-fledged battles. It is estimated that in some of the conflicts well over a hundred men were engaged. The Chinese Merchants' Association and other law-abiding Chinese were in a state of panic. The tongsmen were notably bad marksmen and their toll of innocent bystanders was considerably in excess of their own casualties. In despair, the merchants appealed to Judge Warren W. Foster of the Court of General Sessions to arrange a truce between the warring tongs.

Judge Foster invited members of the two tongs to a great banquet at the Port Arthur Restaurant. There the two leaders met and signed a peace treaty under the terms of which Mott Street became the territory of the On Leong Tong and Pell Street that of the Hip Sings and Four Brothers. After the banquet Tom Lee and Mock Duck vied with each other to see which could drink the most rice wine. Tom Lee was the victor with one hundred and nine cups.

Peace settled down in Chinatown and the merchants sighed with relief. But they had not taken the arrival of Scented Flower into their calculations. Scented Flower had developed into a lovely, fragile young woman and the sisters at the mission decided that she was old enough to wed. She was wooed by a young gardener named Tsin Lien who, unknown to the sisters, was a member of the On Leong Tong. Tsin Lien married Scented Flower and brought his lovely young bride to New York where he flaunted her before her former husband, Lo Hee Dong, who had become one of Mock Duck's lieutenants.

Mock Duck's organization had been strengthened by many new recruits from San Francisco and he now felt powerful enough to seize control of all Chinatown. He wrote an indignant letter to the On Leongs demanding the immediate surrender of Scented Flower to Lo. The On Leongs did not even deign to answer. Mock Duck dispatched an ultimatum to Tom Lee—either

Scented Flower would be returned or there would be open war. Tom Lee sent the emissary back without a reply and both sides began to arm themselves for battle.

On the night of August 15, 1909, two of Mock Duck's hatchetmen stealthily climbed the back stairway of 17 Mott Street. In a bedroom in the second floor they found Scented Flower sleeping under the care of an aged amah. The old woman was knocked unconscious with a single blow, then the hatchetmen turned on Scented Flower and stabbed her to death. They stripped her body and slashed it repeatedly with the sharp blades of their snickersnees. Finally they sliced off the fingers of her right hand and carried them to Mock Duck.

The next morning flags of war billowed out from the roofs of both the On Leong and Hip Sing headquarters. Pell and Mott Streets bristled with armed men. Inflammatory posters appeared on the sides of buildings and leaders of both tongs rallied their men for battle. By nightfall two men had been killed and a restaurant on Mott Street dynamited.

The Chinese Theatre on Doyers Street, since converted into a mission, became the focal point for battle. The theatre was run by a member of the On Leongs and the tong gathered there nightly for entertainment. One or two of the Hip Sings would slip in among them and while the attention of the audience was held by the actors a Hip Sing hatchetman would quietly strangle an enemy or cut his throat. Hip Sing gunmen, concealed in the doorways of Doyers Street, would fire on the On Leongs as they came out through the exits and on at least two occasions the Hip Sings invaded the threatre in force. Pitched battles ensued in which members of the rival tongs chased each other through the aisles and across the stage. The number of men killed in the theatre is unknown, for many were buried secretly, but estimates range from thirty to over a hundred.

When the life of the leading actor, Ah Hoon, was threatened, the police intervened and two uniformed officers sat stolidly on the stage while the play was performed. Ah Hoon was guarded day and night by the On Leongs but despite these precautions he was killed. While he slept in a guarded room, one of the Four Brothers was lowered from a roof-top to his window. The hatchetmen slit the actor's throat without waking his white mistress who slept beside him. Not until morning did Coochie Mary's screams cause the On Leong guards to break down the door.

Again battles raged in the streets of Chinatown. At night the tongsmen surreptitiously buried their dead in vacant lots or subterranean passageways. The merchants were on the verge of

bankruptcy, but no appeal to city officials was of any avail. Mock Duck was determined to be the overlord of Chinatown's gambling, opium and prostitution rackets whatever the cost. While the On Leongs, inflamed by the brutal murder of Scented Flower, swore that they would fight to the last man. The police were powerless to stop the slaughter even though they patrolled the three narrow streets in groups of four or eight. There seemed to be no end to the battle for as soon as tongsmen were killed fresh recruits were rushed in from Chicago or the West Coast.

Then there appeared in Chinatown a new tong called the Kim Lan Wui Saw which sought to take advantage of the war between the old rivals in order to take over the gambling interests. Mock Duck called a truce and met with the On Leongs. It was agreed that Scented Flower's murder should be forgotten and the enemies would combine to exterminate the Kim Lan Wui Saw. The next day, the forces of the On Leong Tong and the Hip Sings joined together in an assault on the new tong's head quarters.

By this time the tong battles had grown to such proportions that a national cry was set up against the Chinese although only a relatively small number of the Chinese in America had been participants in the war. The Chinese government at length decided that it was time to intervene and they appealed to the State Department and sent over officials to confer with the New York Police. Finally through threats and cajolery, leaders of the three tongs met with the Chinese Merchants' Association and agreed upon a peace treaty. Chinatown was parcelled out among the warring factions to the apparent satisfaction of each. The tong wars were ended and have never sprung up again with a brief exception in 1921 when dissident factors among the On Leongs staged a half-hearted revolt. Since then the Chinese community has frequently been praised by police officials for having the lowest crime rate of any section of New York.

But what of Scented Flower? What became of her mutilated body? No one seems to know. In Chinatown they shake their heads when you speak of her and claim they have never heard her name. Nevertheless if you are persistent enough you may hear rumors. One of these is that Scented Flower is buried in an underground passage, long walled up, beneath the Chinese Theatre. Another, more pleasant to believe, is that Tsin Lien had her body cremated and sent the ashes back to Canton where they were scattered over the turbid waters of the Pearl River.

the sound of murder

by . . . William P. McGivern

There was something wrong about the way the argument had ended — something very, very wrong. What was it?

THE Orient Express stops for an hour or more at the Yugoslav-Trieste border. Customs are a formality as a rule, but the changing of foreign currencies into dinars takes quite a bit of time.

Knowing this, Adam James yawned slightly as the train pulled into Sesana. He wasn't really bored; he merely wished he were in Belgrade, at work, instead of here at the frontier. He rubbed the window of his compartment with the palm of his hand. There was little to see outside—uniformed customs officials waiting to board the train, an oiler walking down the opposite track, and beyond the wooden station, white foothills under a dark sky. It was a cheerless prospect; the hills were huddled together, as if the earth had hunched its shoulders against the bitter weather.

The customs officer knocked and entered, bringing in a touch of coldness on his clothes and breath. He was cordial and efficient, and bowed himself out with a smile a few minutes later. The money-control officer was equally cordial, but his work took more time. Finally he too went

---

"It was impossible to take a trip on the Orient Express without writing something about it," says the author. William P. McGivern is the author of the recent MENTION MY NAME IN MOMBASA *(Dodd Mead, 1958) and other novels including* THE BIG HEAT *(Dodd Mead, 1953)* NIGHT EXTRA *(Dodd Mead, 1957), etc.*

Copyright, 1952, by McCall Corporation.
Reprinted by permission of Lurton Blassingame.

away, and Adam sat down with his book, a dull but important one on Yugoslavian politics, and lit his pipe.

However, his moment of peace was brief. The argument between the couple in the adjoining compartment flared up again, and he closed his book with a sigh. They had been at it, off and on, since the Express had left Trieste an hour or so ago, and the partition between the compartments was so thin that Adam could hardly ignore the noise. They spoke Croatian or Serbian, neither of which he understood, but the anger in their voices was unmistakable—no matter what the language.

He had noticed them in Trieste where they had boarded the train. The woman was very attractive, with light blonde hair, clear fresh skin, and the slender, gracefully muscled legs of a dancer. She was in her early thirties, Adam had guessed, and wore a plum-colored tweed suit under a good fur coat. The man was stout and florid, with small alert eyes, and a manner of petulant importance. He was fastidiously turned out in a black overcoat with a fur-trimmed collar, a black Homburg, and, rather inevitably Adam had thought, carried a cane. His gray flannel trousers were sharply creased, and his spats gleamed whitely against his glossy black shoes.

There was something about them, some constraint in their manner, that had caught Adam's attention. They said little to each other as they waited to board the train, but there was a quality in the set of their shoulders which indicated they had plenty to say, and were only waiting for the chance to say it.

Unfortunately for himself, Adam thought, they got their chance when they were finally alone in their compartment At first he'd been mildly interested in their bickering; but as they became angrier and louder, he had become bored and irritated.

There was a knock on the door, and the conductor entered. He was a small, neatly built man with quick intelligent eyes, and had a tiny black mustache above a generous but cautious mouth.

"Your passport, sir," he said, handing Adam the slim green gold-lettered booklet. "Everything is in order. You will not be disturbed again until we arrive in Belgrade."

"Thanks, but I haven't been disturbed," Adam said.

The conductor raised his eyebrows. "That's an unusual reaction for an American. Most of you are—well, impulsive. You have no patience."

"Oh, there are all types of Americans," Adam said with a smile. "Also, there are all types of French, British, and even Yugoslavians, I imagine."

"No, you are wrong. Here in

Yugoslavia we grow up with the land, and become like it, slow and patient. You Americans are different. Excitable, I mean. You leap at things. That is desirable in some matters, but it can also cause trouble."

"Well, that may be," Adam said. He had spent fifteen years of his life as a foreign correspondent, and his job, reduced to an over-simplification, was to find out what people thought, and why they thought it. He was interested in the conductor's opinions, and he wanted to put the man at ease. He raised a hand as the argument in the next compartment broke out again. "Are they Americans?" he asked innocently.

"No, of course not."

"Well, *they* seem pretty excitable."

The conductor looked blank. Then he smiled good-humoredly. "I asked for that, as you say. No, they are Yugoslavians. The Duvecs—she is a dancer, and he is an actor." The conductor listened to the argument with a little smile. "The artistic temperament," he said. "Well, I must go on with my work. I have not offended you with my directness, eh?"

"Certainly not. Stop by when you get a minute and we'll finish our talk."

"Thank you, I shall try."

The conductor went away and Adam returned to his book. He was grateful, a chapter later, when the train began to move. Sesana was behind them now. They would pass Zagreb sometime after dinner, and be in Belgrade the following morning. He would have been almost cheerful if it weren't for the argument in the next compartment.

The couple had reached a new and higher pitch after a few moments of blessed silence. The woman's voice was shrill now, where before it had been somewhat controlled. The man shouted at her whenever she ceased speaking. This continued for a few moments, and then Adam heard the door of the compartment jerked open energetically. The man shouted a last sentence or two, then the door was banged shut with angry finality. Adam heard the man's heavy footsteps pass his door, and fade away in the direction of the dining-car.

"Well, well," he thought, "peace at last!" There was nothing quite like a door-slamming exit to put an end to an argument. Perversely, however, now that everything was quiet, he lost interest in his book. He decided to have dinner, and finish his reading later — though probably by then the argument would be on again, he thought wryly, and he'd berate himself for missing the present opportunity.

He washed his face, combed his hair, and walked through the lurching train to the dining car. There were two third-class

coaches connected to the *Wagon-Lit,* filled with stolid, impassive soldiers who endured the unheated compartments with the stoic acceptance of domestic animals.

There was no menu on the Express, just the one *prefixe* dinner: Soup, roast veal and vegetables served with a theoretically white, but in fact, orange-colored Dalmatian wine. This was followed by stewed prunes, and thick sweet Turkish coffee.

The man in the fur-trimmed overcoat, Duvec, was seated at the far end of the diner, hungrily and belligerently attacking a bowl of soup. He wore an angrily righteous look, Adam thought, and was probably reviewing the argument with his wife in the most favorable possible light. Duvec wore his overcoat buttoned up to the throat, and occasionally put down his spoon and rubbed his plump hands together to warm them, though the diner wasn't cold; Adam was comfortable enough in his suit-coat.

The sleeping car conductor entered the diner a few moments later, looking pale and agitated. He glanced about quickly, then striding to Duvec's table, he bent and whispered a few words. Their effect was electric. Duvec sprang to his feet, almost overturning his table, and his mouth opened and closed soundlessly.

"Please come with me," the conductor said in a firm voice.

The two men hurried from the car, the other diners staring after them curiously. Adam frowned at the tablecloth for a moment or so, oddly disturbed. Finally, obeying a compulsion he didn't quite understand, he rose and started back through the train for the sleeping-car. But at the vestibule he was stopped by a blue-uniformed mail car guard. The man put a hand against Adam's chest.

"You must not enter," he said, in slow, laborious English.

"But this is my car," Adam said.

"You must not come in."

"Has something happened?"

The guard merely shook his round head stubbornly.

At this point the sleeping car conductor appeared in the opposite vestibule. He opened the door, spoke a few words to the mail car guard, and the man took his hand from Adam's chest.

"You may come in," the conductor said.

"What has happened?" Adam asked.

"A great tragedy, a great tragedy," the conductor said, rubbing his mustache nervously. Adam became aware that the train was slowing down.

"We're stopping?" he asked.

"Yes, yes. Please come inside."

Adam followed him into the sleeping car and turned the corner into the aisle. Duvec stood before the open door of his compartment, sobbing terribly. Beyond him, held by two mail car

guards, was a stocky Yugoslavian soldier in a patched and dirty uniform. Duvec turned away from his compartment and sagged weakly against the wall. He beat a fist slowly against his forehead, and his lips opened and closed as if he were praying.

Adam stepped forward and glanced into Duvec's compartment. He knew what he would see. Somehow he had anticipated this; but it was still a jarring, shocking sight. Mrs. Duvec lay on the floor in the careless, undignified sprawl of death. One slender leg was doubled under her body, and a lock of blonde hair lay across her pale throat. The bronze handle of a letter opener—or a knife—protruded from between her breasts.

The train had come to a full stop. There was no sound as Adam stepped back from the compartment except Duvec's hoarse, strangled sobs.

The conductor touched Adam's arm. "You will be good enough to remain in your compartment, please. I have sent a messenger back to the police at Sesana. We will wait until they arrive."

"Naturally," Adam rejoined. "But what happened?"

"It was the soldier. He thought all the passengers were in the dining car. He came in to pilfer what he could, I imagine. He was surprised when he found the woman here, he lost his head—" The conductor shrugged eloquently. "It is a great tragedy."

The soldier seemed to understand what was being said. His eyes were wild and frightened. He suddenly shouted, *"Ni! Ni!"* and chattered out a stream of words which Adam didn't understand.

"He protests his innocence," the conductor said matter-of-factly. "That is to be expected."

"He lies, he lies!" Duvec said in a ragged voice. "He killed my wife, and he must die for it."

"There is no doubt he is guilty," the conductor agreed. "We can establish that easily. Your wife was alive when you left her?"

"Yes, yes! My God, yes!" Duvec cried. He began to sob again, hopelessly, piteously. "We had a quarrel, a silly, stupid quarrel, and I left in anger. But she was alive, alive as we are now." He glanced at Adam, as if noticing him for the first time. "But *you* must have heard our quarrel."

"Yes, I heard it," Adam said.

"Then you heard our voices until the moment I left."

Adam nodded. "Yes, I heard you."

The conductor shrugged. "Then there is proof that she was alive when her husband left. The soldier admits going into her compartment—but at that point he loses his love for the truth."

"What's his story?" Adam asked.

"He says that Mrs. Duvec was

already dead. This is why he attempted to flee, he tells us."

"Who caught him?"

"I had appointed a guard for this car while I worked out space plans with the attendant in the next car," the conductor said. "We get a crowd at Zagreb, and it is necessary to prepare for them in advance, you see. I appointed a guard because the sleeping car is empty during the dinner hour, and the soldiers—well, you understand how it is with soldiers. The guard, a man from the mail car, was at the opposite vestibule—that is he was at the other end of the car from where he now stands. Something caused him to turn and glance down the aisle. He saw the soldier backing out of the Duvecs' compartment. He shouted, and the soldier attempted to run back to his own car. But the guard caught him, fortunately."

"What caused the guard to look down the aisle?"

The conductor raised his eyebrows. "Who can tell? The good Lord, perhaps; it was an impulse—and it apprehended a murderer. The guard will be officially congratulated.""

"Yes, yes, of course," Adam murmured. "Catching murderers is always a cause for congratulations. Whose knife did the soldier use, by the way?"

The conductor looked blank. He turned to Duvec, who said, "It was my wife's letter-opener. Perhaps she was using it when the soldier burst in on her."

"That is logical," the conductor said, nodding. "We will get the truth from him, all of it, you will see."

Suddenly the soldier shouted wildly and broke away from his two guards. He ran down the narrow aisle, jerked open the door at the end of the car, and disappeared. The guards lumbered after him, and Duvec screamed, "Get him, get him, the murderer!"

The conductor remained calm. "He cannot leave the train," he said. "The vestibule doors are secured from the outside. That was my first order. He will be caught, never fear."

Adam glanced at Duvec and the conductor, frowning. Finally he said, "Excuse me, please," and entered his own compartment. He sat down and lit his pipe.

Something was wrong about all this, wrong as the very devil, and he could feel it in his bones. But how could he prove it? He stretched his long legs out in front of him and rested his head against the back of the seat. Proof . . . Where was it? He puffed on his pipe, trying to recall everything that had happened since the Express left Trieste. He sorted out all the details he could remember, and juggled them into different relationships, turned them upside down and inside out,

trying desperately to justify his conviction.

The conductor appeared in his doorway ten minutes later, wearing a small pleased smile. "It is finished," he said. "We have caught him. He sought to hide in the coal car, but was found."

Adam stood up and began knocking the dottle from his pipe. "That's fine," he said. "The only thing is, you've got the wrong man."

"The wrong man? Impossible! His guilt is proven by his attempt to escape."

"Nonsense. He's simply scared out of his wits. Bring everyone here, and I'll show you the murderer," Adam said, marvelling slightly at the ring of confidence in his voice.

The conductor squared his shoulders stubbornly. "This is a police matter, I must remind you."

"Yes, but it won't redound to your credit to present them with an innocent suspect when they arrive."

The conductor rubbed his thin black mustache. "Very well," he said at last. "I am not afraid to test your opinion against mine. I have reached my conclusions logically. I am not in error."

"We'll see," Adam said.

The soldier was brought back down the aisle, securely held by two mail car guards. He was not more than eighteen, Adam saw, a strongly-built youth with a dull face and blank hopeless eyes; obviously he had resigned himself to his fate. Duvec, who still wore his fur-trimmed overcoat, stood at the end of the aisle, occasionally rubbing a hand despairingly over his broad forehead.

Adam was in the doorway of his compartment. The soldier and his guards were at his left, Duvec and the conductor on his right. They all watched him expectantly.

"This soldier did not kill Mrs. Duvec," Adam said quietly.

"What do you know about it?" Duvec shouted.

"If you listen, you will find out."

"I will not listen. You have no authority here."

"Silence!" the conductor said, in a sharp voice. "I am in charge until the police arrive. I have given the American permission to speak."

"Thank you," said Adam. "I'll continue. As I have said, the soldier did not kill Mrs. Duvec. I think I can prove that to everyone's satisfaction. First of all, has it not struck you as odd that the guard in this car did not hear Mrs. Duvec scream?"

For an instant there was silence. Then the conductor said, "She was struck down before she could cry out." However, Adam's question brought a tiny frown to his face.

"I think that's an unlikely explanation," Adam said. "Let's re-

construct what must have happened if the soldier is the murderer. First, he opened the door of the compartment. Mrs. Duvec looked up at him, startled and probably frightened. What would one expect her to do? Scream, of course."

"My wife was no silly maiden," Duvec snapped. "She would not scream at the sight of a man; she would have ordered him from the compartment. That is unquestionably what happened. She asked him to leave, ordered him to leave. He took advantage of that moment to seize the letter-opener from her and plunge it into her heart. Yes, he silenced her before she could scream."

The conductor nodded, looking somewhat relieved. "Yes, certainly that is it," he said.

"No, that isn't it," Adam said. "Why would a strong agile young man use a knife on a woman? If he wanted to silence her, he would use his hands. In the time it would take him to grasp the knife away from her, and strike her down with it, she might have screamed half a dozen times. And yet, I repeat, the guard in this car heard no sound at all from Mrs. Duvec."

The conductor shook his head impatiently. "You are making up theories. We are dealing with facts. According to your own testimony, Mrs. Duvec was alive when her husband left the compartment. She was dead when the soldier left the compartment. Those are the facts. No one but the soldier could have killed her."

"You're wrong, but it's partly my fault," Adam said. "I've misled you. However, I'll clear things up now. There's the murderer," he said—and he pointed at Duvec.

"Monstrous!" Duvec shouted. "I will not stand for these slanders."

"Let me ask you this," Adam said. "Why are you wearing a heavy overcoat in a comfortably heated train? What is under it, Duvec? Or, more to the point, what *isn't* under it?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," Duvec snapped.

"I'll tell you, then," Adam said. "What *isn't* under that overcoat is your suit coat—the suit coat which was bloodied when you murdered your wife. When I saw you in the diner I knew something was odd. You wouldn't have worn an overcoat all the way from Trieste, so you must have put it on before leaving your compartment. However, the emotional fireworks accompanying your departure made it seem unlikely that you would have stopped to put on an overcoat. That routine bit of business would have shattered the effect of your exit. But why wear the coat at all? The train isn't cold. Therefore, I decided, it was worn not for comfort but for camouflage.

And what was it you were so eager to camouflage?"

"You are talking like a madman," Duvec said. "My wife was alive when I left her. You know that is true. You said you heard us."

"I said I heard *you*," Adam corrected him. "Duvec, you killed your wife in a moment of rage. This puts you in a tough predicament. There was a witness of sorts to the crime—an auditory witness, in the next compartment—myself, of course. But I could be used to your advantage. You could create the illusion that your wife was alive when you left her by taking both parts of the dialogue for a moment or so before banging out of the compartment. This was no trick for an actor. Meanwhile, as you imitated your wife's voice, you removed your bloodstained suit coat and got into your overcoat. Then you left the compartment with a final artistic bellow at your wife. The suit coat, I'll bet, you either hid in your compartment, or threw off the train on the way to the diner. In either event, a search will produce it."

"Talk, talk, talk!" Duvec cried.

"Take off your overcoat," said Adam.

"This is childish nonsense," Duvec said angrily. He unbuttoned his overcoat and flung it open. He wore a gray tweed jacket above gray flannel trousers. There was a little silence, in which Adam felt his stomach contract unpleasantly. "Are you satisfied now?" Duvec said contemptuously.

The conductor had unconsciously placed a hand on Duvec's arm as Adam had talked. Now he removed it hastily. "Forgive me," he said.

"Wait a minute," Adam said, frowning. He had noticed that Duvec wore ruby cuff links. What was wrong with that?

"No—enough," the conductor said angrily. "There will be no more of these wild accusations."

"No, I'm right," Adam snapped. "He wouldn't wear cuff links with a tweed jacket, any more than he'd wear black shoes with a brown suit. Of course! He changed into the tweed jacket, and hid the bloodstained suit coat underneath the overcoat. He threw the suit coat out one of the vestibule doors. He was fairly safe then; at least he had an alibi. But luck joined forces with him and provided the crime with a reasonable suspect. The soldier blundered onto the scene and put Duvec completely into the clear. But it won't work. I'll bet one hundred dollars to a dinar that the police will find a bloodstained flannel jacket within ten miles of this spot."

Duvec began to weep. "I can stand no more!" he cried. "My wife is dead, and I hear myself called her murderer!" He turned

aside, still sobbing, and put a hand to the vestibule door for support. The gesture was so natural that no one noticed him reach for the doorknob. He jerked open the door and was into the vestibule before anyone could move. The conductor shouted at the mail car guards who still held the soldier. They plunged out of the car after Duvec, with the conductor on their heels.

They caught him in the next coach and dragged him back to the sleeping car. Duvec offered no resistance. He stared straight ahead with shoulders slumped, and there was an expression of terrible anguish on his face. Adam realized that for the first time since the murder of his wife Duvec had ceased to act.

In a low, trembling voice, he said, "She was going to leave me, you see. I—couldn't stand that. I —couldn't."

Half an hour later the conductor came to Adam's compartment. "You must excuse me," he said, rather sheepishly. "I think of what I said about the excitable Americans, and my face becomes hot with shame. I must apologize."

"Please don't worry about that," Adam said.

"But I do not understand completely. Your proof was not overwhelming, I do not think. And yet you seemed so *sure*."

"I was sure," Adam said. "You see, in the classic tradition, Duvec made one mistake which I didn't bother to mention. When he acted out the scene with his dead wife, he engineered the dialogue badly. He shouted a few last words at her, you will remember, and then banged the door."

The conductor looked blank. Finally he rubbed his mustache and smiled slowly.

"You understand, of course," Adam said. "In Yugoslavia or America, anywhere for that matter, arguments between husbands and wives very seldom end that way. When I realized that, I knew Duvec was guilty. You see Mrs. Duvec wouldn't have let him get away with the last word—if she were alive, that is."

"But of course," the conductor agreed, nodding gravely.

under sentence of death

by . . . Edgar Wallace

The Ringer insisted the man was innocent. Bliss was inclined to agree. The Home Secretary called it bunkum.

THERE were two schools of thought at Scotland Yard. There were those who believed that The Ringer worked single-handed, and those who were convinced that he controlled an organization and had the assistance of at least half a dozen people.

Inspector Bliss was of the first school, and instanced the killing of Miska Guild in proof.

"He's entirely on his own," he said. "Even his helper in that case was an innocent man who had no idea he was being used to attract the attention of the police."

"By the way, is there any news of him?" asked the Assistant Commissioner.

Bliss shook his head.

"He's in London; I was confident of that—now I know. If you had told me, sir, a few years ago, that any man could escape the police by disguise I should have laughed. But this man's disguises are perfect. He *is* the character he pretends to be. Take Wally the Nose, with his rabbit's teeth and his red eyes. Who would have imagined that a set of fake teeth worn over his others and a little

*The fact that Doubleday could publish, in 1939, a book about Wallace—*EDGAR WALLACE—THE BIOGRAPHY OF A PHENOMENON *(by Margaret Lane) may be a clue to how he was regarded. Few writers have been mourned like he was, with almost a sense of personal loss, by people in all walks of life.*

Originally published as CASE OF THE HOME SECRETARY in THE RINGER RETURNS. Copyright 1928 by Edgar Wallace. Copyright renewed 1956 by Patricia Marion Caldecott Frere.

coloring to his eyelids, plus the want of a shave, would be sufficient to hide him from me? I am one of the few people who have seen him without make-up, and yet he fooled me."

"Why do you think he is in London?"

Chief Inspector Bliss took out his pocketcase and opening this, searched the papers it contained for a letter.

"It came this morning."

Colonel Walford stared up at him.

"From The Ringer?"

Bliss nodded.

"Typewritten on the same machine he used when he wrote to Miska Guild—the 's' is out of alignment and the tails of the 'p's' are worn."

Colonel Walford put on his glasses and read:

Michael Benner, now under sentence of death, is innocent. I think you knew this when you gave evidence against him at the Old Bailey, for you brought out every point in his favor. Lee Lavinski killed the old man, but was disturbed by Benner before he could get the loot. Lee left for Canada two days after the murder. Be a good fellow and help save this man.

There was no signature.

"What's the idea?" The Commissioner looked up over his glasses.

"The Ringer is right," said Bliss quietly. "Benner did not kill old Estholl—and I have discovered that Lavinski was in England when the murder was committed."

The crime of which he spoke was one of those commonplace crimes which excite little interest, since the guilt of the man accused seemed beyond doubt and the issue of the trial a foregone conclusion. Estholl was a rich man of seventy, who lived in a small Bloomsbury hotel. He was in the habit of carrying around large sums of money—a peculiar failing of all men who have risen from poverty to riches by their own efforts.

At four o'clock one wintry morning a guest at the hotel, who had been playing cards in his sitting-room with a party of friends, came out into the corridor and saw Benner, who was the night porter, emerge from the old man's room, carrying in his hand a blood-stained hammer. The man's face was white, he seemed dazed, and when challenged was speechless.

Rushing into the room the guest saw old Estholl lying on the bed in a pool of blood, dead. The porter's story after his arrest was that he had heard the old man's bell ring and had gone up to his room and knocked. Having no answer he opened the door and went in. He saw the hammer lying on the bed and picked it up

mechanically, being so horrified that he did not know what he was doing.

Benner was a young married man and in financial difficulties. He was desperately in need of money and had tried that evening to borrow seven pounds from the manageress of the hotel. Moreover, he had said to the head porter, "Look at old Estholl! If I had half of the money that he has in his pocket I shouldn't be worrying my head off tonight!"

Protesting his innocence, Benner went to the Old Bailey, and, after a trial which lasted less than a day, was condemned.

"The hammer was the property of the hotel, and Benner had access to the workroom where it was usually kept," said Bliss; "but, as against that, the workroom, which is in the hotel basement, was the easiest to enter from the outside, and the window was, in fact, found open in the morning."

"Is there any hope for Benner?"

Bliss shook his head.

"No. The Court has dismissed his appeal—and Strathpenner is not the kind of man who would have mercy; old Estholl was, unfortunately, a friend of his."

The Commissioner looked at the letter again, and ran his fingers through his hair irritably.

"Why should The Ringer bother his head about Benner?" he asked, and the ghost of a smile appeared on the bearded face of the detective.

"The trouble with The Ringer is that he can't mind his own business," he said. "That little note means that he is in the case—he doesn't drop letters around unless he's vitally interested; and if he's vitally interested in Benner, then we're going to see something rather dramatic. By the way, the Home Secretary has sent for me in connection with this affair."

"Is he likely to be influenced by you, Inspector?" asked Colonel Walford drily.

"If I agree with him, yes; if I don't, no," said Bliss.

He went back to his room to learn that a visitor had called, and before his secretary told him her name he guessed her identity.

She was a pretty girl, despite the haggard lines which told of sleepless nights. She was dressed much better than when he had seen her at the Old Bailey.

"Well, Mrs. Benner," he said kindly, "what can I do?"

Her lips quivered.

"I don't know, sir. . . . I know Jim is innocent. He's incapable of doing such a horrible thing. I called at the Home Office, but the gentleman wouldn't see me."

Again Bliss looked at her clothes: they were obviously new. As though she read his thoughts: "I'm not in a bad way, sir—for money, I mean. A gentleman sent me twenty five-pound notes last

week, and that paid off all poor Jim's debts and left me enough to live on for a bit."

"Who sent the money?" asked Bliss quickly, but here she could not give him information. It had arrived by post and was unaccompanied by any card or name.

"It might have been a woman who sent it?" suggested Bliss, though he knew better. "There was no letter at all?"

She shook her head.

"Only a piece of paper. I've got it here."

She fumbled in her bag and produced a strip of paper torn off the edge of a newspaper, on which was typed "DON'T LOSE HOPE."

The "s" was out of alignment, the tail of "p" was faint. Bliss smiled to himself, but it was a grim smile.

"You're under distinguished patronage," he said ironically, and then, in a more serious tone: "I'm afraid I can do very little for you. I am seeing—one of the officials at the Home Office this morning, but I'm afraid, Mrs. Benner, you'll have to resign yourself to—"

He did not finish his sentence, as he saw her eyes close and her face grow a shade paler.

Bliss pulled out a chair and bade her sit down; and somehow the sight of this woman in her agony brought a pang to a heart not easily touched.

"No hope?" she whispered, and shook her head in anticipation of his answer.

"A very faint one, I'm afraid," said the detective.

"But you don't think he's guilty, Mr. Bliss? When I saw Jim in Pentonville he told me that you didn't think so. It is horrible, horrible! He couldn't have done such an awful thing!"

Bliss was thinking rapidly. He had a dim idea of The Ringer's methods, and now he was searching here and there to find the avenue by which this ruthless man might approach the case.

"Have you any relations?"

She shook her head.

"No brothers?"

Again she gave him the negative.

"Good! Now, Mrs. Benner, I'll do the best I can for you, and in return I want you to do something for me. If the man who sent you that money approaches you, or if anybody who is unknown to you calls on you or asks you to meet them, I want you to telephone me here."

He scribbled down the number on a slip of paper and passed it across to her. "If anybody comes to you purporting to be from Scotland Yard, or to have any position of authority whatever, I want you to telephone to me about that also. I'm going to do what I can for your husband, and, though I'm afraid it isn't much, it will be my best."

It was half-past two when he arrived at the Home Office, and, by some miracle, Mr. Strathpenner had arrived. He was the despair of his subordinates, a man without method or system. There were days when he would not come to the office at all; other and more frequent days when he would put in an appearance an hour before the staff left, with the result that they were kept working into the night.

The Right Honorable William Strathpenner, His Majesty's principal Secretary of State, was a singularly unpopular man, both in and outside his party. He was pompous, unimaginative, a little uncouth of speech, intolerable. He had worn his way into the Cabinet as other men had done before him; not by genius of oratory or by political character, but the sheer weight of him had rubbed a place through which he had fallen, first to a minor office under the Crown, and then, by a succession of lucky accidents, to the highest of the subordinate Cabinet positions.

A thin man, short-necked, broad-shouldered, he had the expression of one who was constantly smelling something unpleasant. Political cartoonists had helped to make his face familiar, for his was an easy subject for caricature. The heavy, black, bristling eyebrows, the thick-lens spectacles, the bald head with the black wisps brushed across, his reddish nose—a libel on him, since he was a lifelong abstainer—made him unpleasant to look upon. He was almost as unpleasant to hear, for he had a harsh, grating voice and punctuated his sentences with an irritating little cough.

He kept Bliss waiting twenty minutes before he was admitted to the august presence; and there seemed no reason for the delay, for Mr. Strathpenner was reading a newspaper when he came in. He looked at the slip which announced the name of his visitor.

"Bliss, Bliss? Of course. Yes, yes, you're a police officer—ahem! This Benner case . . . yes, I remember now; I asked you to see me—ahem!"

He blinked across the table at Bliss, and his face had more than ever that unpleasant-smell expression.

"Now what do you know about this, hey? I haven't seen the Judge, but there's no doubt in my mind that this blackguard should suffer the extreme penalty of the law. This report, of course, is bunkum." He tapped the newspaper with his finger. "The usual bunkum—ahem! I don't believe in confessions—you don't believe in confessions?"

"Confessions, sir?" The inspector gazed at him in astonishment.

"Haven't you seen it?" Strath-

penner threw the paper across the table. "There it is. Use your eyes . . . third column. . . ."

It was not in the third, but the fifth column, and the item of news was headed: "Hotel Murder Confession. Remarkable Statement by Red-handed Murderer."

Ottawa.

A man named Lavinski, who shot two policemen in cold blood in the streets of Montreal last night, when detected in the act of breaking into the Canadian Bank, and was shot by a third policeman, has made a remarkable statement before a magistrate who was called to his bedside at the hospital.

Lavinski is not expected to recover from his wounds, and in the course of his statement he said that he was responsible for the murder of Mr. Estholl, for which a man named Benner lies under sentence of death in London. Lavinski says that he made an entrance to the hotel knowing that Mr. Estholl carried large sums of money in his pocket, that he took a hammer intending to use the claw to open the door in case it was locked.

Estholl woke up as he entered the room, and Lavinski says that he struck him with the hammer, though he was not aware that he had inflicted a fatal injury. He then discovered that the dead man had a hanging bell-push in his hand, and fearing that he had rung it, he made his escape without attempting to search his pockets. The statement has been attested before a magistrate.

Bliss looked up and met the Home Secretary's gaze.

"Well? Bunkum, eh? You've had no official notification at Scotland Yard?"

"No sir."

"I thought not; I thought not —ahem! An old trick, eh, Inspector? You've had that sort of thing played on you before. It won't save Benner, I assure you —ahem! I assure you!"

Bliss gaped at him.

"But you're not going to hang this man until you get this statement over from Canada?"

"Don't be absurd, Inspector, don't be absurd! If a Secretary of State were to be influenced by newspaper reports where would he be, eh? Did you read the last paragraph?"

Bliss took up the paper again and saw, later:

The man Lavinski died before he could sign the statement he had made before Mr. Prideaux.

"Let me tell you, sir"—Mr. Strathpenner wagged an admonitory finger—"His Majesty's Secretary of State is not to be influenced by wild-cat stories of this kind . . . by newspaper reports, by—ahem!—hearsay evidence as it were. What are we to do? I ask you! On the unsigned deposition of a—er—convicted murderer caught in the act. Release this man Benner?"

"You could grant him a res-

pite, sir," suggested Bliss quietly.

Mr. Strathpenner sat back in his chair and his tone became icy.

"I am not asking your advice, Inspector. . . . If I lose my pocket-book or my watch I have no doubt your advice will be invaluable—ahem! to secure its recovery. Thank you for coming, Inspector."

He waved Bliss from the room. The detective went across to Scotland Yard, but Walford had gone. The only thing he knew was that the death warrant had not been signed. It is part of the Home Secretary's duty to affix his name to a document that will send a fellow-creature from this life, and one of the bravest men who ever sat in a Cabinet refused the second offer of the office for this reason.

Mr. Strathpenner, at any rate, was not in any way distressed by his duty. He had summoned the Judge who had tried the case to meet him the next day, and he went back to his house in Crowborough that night without a single qualm or misgiving.

He was a widower; lived alone except for a large staff of servants, which included a French *chef,* and he dined, a solitary figure in the big mahogany-panelled dining-room, a large German philosophical work propped up before him, for he was an excellent linguist and had a weakness for shallow philosophies if they were propounded with sufficient pretentiousness.

He was so reading at the end of his meal when the visitor was announced. Mr. Strathpenner looked at the card suspiciously. It read: "Mr. James Hagger, 14, High Street, Crouchstead."

Now, Crouchstead was the West of England constituency which had the honor of being represented in Parliament by the Home Secretary, and, since he held his seat by the narrowest of majorities, he resisted the temptation to send the message which rose too readily to his lips.

"All right, show him in here."

He looked at the card again. Who was Mr. Hagger? Probably somebody very important in Crouchstead; somebody he had shaken hands with, probably. An important member of the Crouchstead Freedom Club, likely enough. Mr. Strathpenner loathed Crouchstead and all its social manifestations; yet he screwed a smile into his face when Mr. Hagger was ushered to his presence.

The visitor proved to be a very respectably dressed man, with a heavy black mustache which drooped beneath chin level.

"You remember me, sir?" His voice was deep and solemn. "I met you at the Freedom banquet. I'm the secretary of the Young Workers' League."

Oh, it was the Young Workers' League, was it? thought Mr.

Strathpenner. He had almost forgotten its existence.

"Of course . . . naturally . . . sit down, Mr. Hagger. Will you have a glass of port?"

Mr. Hagger deposited his hat carefully on the floor.

"No, sir, thank you, I'm a lifelong abstainer. I neither touch, taste, nor handle. Of course, I realize that a gentleman like you has to have likker in the 'ouse. It's about this man Benner. . . ."

The Minister stiffened.

"We've been 'aving a talk, some of the leaders of the party in Crouchstead, and we've come to the conclusion it'd be a great mistake to hang that man—"

Mr. Strathpenner shook his head sadly.

"Ah, Mr. Hagger, you've no idea how deeply I have considered this subject, and with what reluctance I have been compelled, or shall be compelled, to allow the law to take its course. You realize that a man in my position . . ."

He continued his justification in terms which he had applied before to stray members of Parliament who had strolled into his room in the House of Commons, and had expressed views similar to those which Mr. Hagger was on the point of enunciating.

"Now, let us leave this—er—unpleasant subject. Will you take some coffee with me? By the way, how did you come?"

"I was brought up from the station in a fly," said Mr. Hagger.

He was very apologetic.

"You quite understand, Mr. Strathpenner, that I had to do my duty. The committee paid my fare up, and I thought it'd be a good chance of seeing you. I've heard about your wonderful house, and I didn't want to miss the chance of seeing it."

Here he touched the Home Secretary on his soft side. The house had an historic as well as an artistic value; it was one of the innumerable John o' Gaunt hunting lodges that stud the county of Sussex. It was indubitably pre-Elizabethan. Mr. Strathpenner was prouder of his home than of any of his attainments. He led the visitor from room to room and was almost genial in his response to the visitor's interest.

". . . Haunted, of course—all these old places are haunted. There's a dungeon . . . the previous owner used it as a coal-cellar! A Philistine, sir—a boor—ahem! —or something objectionable. Come this way."

He opened a stout oak door and preceded his visitor down a flight of stone stairs; showed him not only the dungeon, which had been carefully restored to its earlier grimness, but a lower prison chamber, six feet by six, approached through a stone trap-door.

"Let me show you. . . ."

He went before the other down the ladder.

"We have ringbolts here, almost worn through with age, where the unfortunate prisoners were chained. And yet the place is fairly well ventilated."

"It's a funny thing," said Mr. Hagger, as he carefully descended the ladder, "that the flyman who brought me up from the station told me to be sure to ask you to show me your dungeon."

"Extraordinary," said Mr. Strathpenner, not ill-pleased. "But the place has quite a local reputation."

His Majesty's judges are not to be kept waiting. Sir Charles Jean, the senior Common Law Judge, looked at his watch and closed the case with a vicious snap.

"The Home Secretary said that he would be here at half-past four."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the official who was with him. "I've been on the 'phone to Mr. Strathpenner. He left the house an hour ago and should be here at any moment. It's rather foggy, and he is a very nervous traveller."

"Where is his secretary, Mr. Cliney?"

"He has gone down to Crowborough with some documents for signature—he had only gone ten minutes when Mr. Strathpenner 'phoned through."

"I'm afraid I can wait no longer. I will see him in the morning. I hope you'll impress upon Mr. Strathpenner that there is, in my mind, a very grave doubt about Benner's guilt."

He might have added that he did not think that would have very much influence with the Minister, who had on a previous occasion ignored the recommendation of a judge.

He had hardly gone before the official heard the rasping voice and nervous cough of his chief, and hurried into the secretary's office.

"Sir Charles Jean, eh? And gone? Ahem! Well, well, well! I can't be at the beck and call of judges, my dear man. Or Ringers either, my friend, eh?—ahem!—or Ringers either!"

"Ringers, sir?" said the astonished official.

There was a dry, rasping chuckle.

"Visited me last night, the scoundrel—ahem! That will be something to tell Mr. What's-his-name—Bliss. By the way, call him up and tell him that when I return from Paris on Friday I should like to see him."

"Paris, sir?" asked the startled official. "There is a meeting of the Cabinet on Friday morning."

"I know, I know," testily.

He opened a portfolio, took out a sheet of paper and stared at it owlishly. The official saw the document and thought it a moment to pass along the message.

"Sir Charles asked me to tell

you that he is very doubtful as to whether this man should be executed—"

But the other was scrawling his name.

"There will be a respite of fourteen days," he said. "The matter may come up for consideration next Wednesday after the arrival of the depositions from Canada."

He blotted the sheet and pushed it across to the Under-Secretary.

"The respite may be announced in the newspapers," he said.

"I ought to have known," said Bliss ruefully, "that Strathpenner was the easiest man in the world to impersonate. The curious thing is, it did strike me when I was talking to him."

"How is he?" asked Walford.

"When they released him from his lower dungeon," said Bliss, with the ghost of a smile in his eyes, "he was slightly insane, but not, I think, quite so insane as Mr. Hagger of Crouchstead, who is no longer a life-long abstainer. Mr. Strathpenner used the lower dungeon as a wine cellar, and they have to live on something. They might be living there still if The Ringer hadn't been obliging enough to send me a wire."

INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY AT CAMBRIDGE

THE INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY, much discussed in England during the past year, is planning to open in October. The University Senate agreed, in January, to its foundation as part of Cambridge University. Professor Leon Radzinowicz, now Director of the Department of Criminal Science, the director-designate, has said that he wishes to make it a centre where all—in England and abroad—interested in the cause and cure of crime can exchange information.

With the need in mind for a broad base among the Cambridge faculties and outside, professors of physics, experimental psychology, human ecology and social anthropology are all being asked to serve on the governing body, as well as the director of the Institute of Psychiatry in London. An advisory body of about a dozen people will include lawyers, Cambridge dons, medical men, and, it is hoped, members of the bench.

There are plans for a sort of annual staff college, where those involved in the administration and enforcement of criminal law—such as the police and the judiciary—will meet. The heart of the institute will be its library and its researches, particularly researches into the causes of crime. It is hoped that these will attract experts from all over the world, especially from the British Commonwealth and the United States. A periodical will keep them in touch with developments in similar institutions.

the harrington case

by . . . Thomas Walsh

He'd told him it was a joke —and that was just what it was. A rather deadly joke— a joke on the wrong person.

CARVER, Plainclothesman on Homicide, left the elevator at the fourth floor, and stepped out to a wide marble corridor flanked by glass-paneled doors on either side. "To your right," the operator said. Carver nodded and turned.

It was a very long corridor, running the length of the Gresham Building. There was a stairway at the side farthest from him, and as he turned around a short man in a camel's hair coat was going down this. He wasn't hurrying; Carver, reading the labels on the office doors, didn't pay him much attention.

The fourth door he came to was marked Tammany and Sutorius, Attorneys At Law. He was reaching for the knob when a bald fat man with mildly puzzled eyes stepped out into the corridor from an office on the opposite side.

The fat man looked curious. "You hear anything?" he asked. When Carver shook his head he stopped a little uncertainly, peered up and down, grunted: "Well," and drew back into his

---

Thomas Walsh is the author of the recent DANGEROUS PASSENGER *(Little Brown, 1958),* NIGHTMARE IN MANHATTAN, THE NIGHT WATCH, THE DARK WINDOW, *etc. (also Little Brown). As many reviewers have commented, and Walsh proves in this story, "tension is Thomas Walsh's special concern."*

Originally published in *Black Mask*, October 1934,
under the title of BEST MAN.
Reprinted by permission of Kenneth Littauer.

room. Carver stared after him a moment, pinching his nose thoughtfully.

The door of Tammany and Sutorius was locked. Carver rattled it once to make sure, then rapped his knuckles heavily against the frosted glass panel.

He waited perhaps sixty seconds before rapping again. Inside a man's voice was speaking shrilly, rapidly. At Carver's second knock it choked off, a phone hook was banged down; footsteps inside hobbled across a hard wood floor, and the voice of Abel J. Sutorius, high and a little hysterical, came thinly to him:

"Who—who is it? You'll have to smash the door." He stopped; Carver heard his loud gasping, saw the feeble shadow of his hands beating at the glass. Then his whimper: "My God! My God!"

Carver got his broad knuckles under the knob, lifted it, and crashed his shoulder against the door's wooden edge. Metal splintered and snapped, and the door swung in unevenly. He saw Sutorius kneeling on the floor of the small office, above another man whose body was prone, whose light brown coat was stained with blood.

Sutorius turned to him, his face very white. He babbled: "The man! The one that just left— Did you see him, Carver?"

Coming fast across the rug, Carver didn't answer him. The prone man's eyes were closed, but he was still breathing, with a rapid, liquid sound; he had a long thin face, narrow lips, a small black mustache. There was blood on his checked tie and on the white breast of his shirt.

Sutorius wrung his hands together, gasped as Carver reached for the phone: "I called the police —the ambulance. My God, Carver, do something! Perhaps he's still downstairs. He was wearing a camel's hair coat, a dark hat. I couldn't see his face— he had a handkerchief over it— but he was short and pretty broad. He came in while I was talking to De Villier; he didn't say anything. Just shot and ran out—!" He wiped his face.

"You gave him two minutes start," Carver said gravely. He looked up sidewise at the crippled attorney. "This building has three exits and a subway station in the cellar. He could have used any of them in sixty seconds."

Sutorius breathed heavily, looking down at the wounded man. He shuddered again. "It was horrible, Carver. That fellow came in just after Frenchy got here. He closed the door to the hall and fired twice without speaking at all, before I could get out of my chair. Then he went out and locked it after him. It didn't seem to take a moment. I phoned for help first, of course. Then I heard you knocking—"

The fat, bald man stood in the

doorway, with other faces crowded over him. He was staring at De Villier, and there wasn't much color in his pudgy cheeks. He said to someone behind him: "I got the office just across the hall. Yeh, I heard the shots but I thought maybe they were backfires. I asked that man—" Carver pushed him out tiredly with one hand on his fat stomach and closed the door. His light eyes were cold, expressionless, and not sorry. He said: "Don't throw a convulsion, Sutorius. Frenchy got it the way he gave it—in the back. It was way past due."

The lawyer got up, groaning as his weight went on to his withered leg. "It's horrible," he repeated faintly. "It means my practice will be ruined. Shot down in my office—"

Carver said: "Think of that the next time before you play with crook trade!"

In the street under him a siren screamed, and as it died an ambulance bell jangled tinnily on the avenue. A minute later the room was filled with people; two stretcher bearers, an interne in white, two blue coated patrolmen and a detective in plainclothes who looked surprised and said: "Hello, Joe," when he saw Carver there.

Carver nodded to him, pushed out through the crowd at the door and went downstairs to the lobby. He bought some cigarettes at the stand there, then went up again slowly, using the stairs, after the stretcher was brought down. Meanwhile the plainclothesman was questioning Sutorius in the office.

The lawyer's voice was calmer now, but his narrow mouth was still white and nervous. He made aimless gestures as he spoke, wiped his cheeks twice with a linen handkerchief.

When he had finished Carver said: "I saw this bird in the camel's hair coat go downstairs, Barnes. Only I didn't know what was wrong until I got in the room here. If Sutorius had hollered through the door when I knocked first I could have got him."

Sutorius wiped his lips again. "But, Carver, in a position like that you don't do logical things. My first thought, of course, was to phone the police. I was doing that when you came."

Carver grunted and got up. He took the elevator down with Barnes and got in the police car with him. After two blocks he said: "I don't like coincidences. I don't like Sutorius. The whole thing smells, Barnes. Sutorius called me an hour ago and said he wanted to see me about something very important. When I get up here I'm just in time to see this bird leave. Sutorius doesn't holler to me what's wrong; he just lets out a few squeals and runs back. When I find out what it is, camel's hair has two minutes start. Too late to catch him."

Barnes shrugged. "Open and shut to me, Joe."

"Too much," Carver growled. "That's the point. Me, I have to back up that shyster's story. It looks like a plant, and I don't like plants. Not even when they smell nice. This one doesn't."

He stared plaintively out at Park Avenue traffic, worrying at his lips.

Al Tammany, his partner Sutorius, Carver and a broad shouldered young man, whom Carver didn't know, were in the hospital reception room waiting for news of the wounded man.

Al Tammany stopped being genial when the door behind him opened. His head turned quickly on its beefy neck, and his heavy jowls, his small merry eyes, took on concern in the instant that he waited. Watching him, Carver thought that his eyes were like a pig's—a happy, plump pig that was trying unsuccessfully to look sad.

He asked: "What's the news, doctor?"

The doctor was a lean jawed, very clean man in surgical white. He closed the door behind him and made twin black arches with his brows across a narrow, grave face. "Unfortunate," he said, spreading his hands. "De Villier died on the operating table. I don't see how he lasted an hour with his right lung blown apart."

Abel J. Sutorius let out a long breath without much sound to it. Tammany said: "Poor Frenchy," and shook his head dolefully. The young man in the corner whom Carver didn't know looked briefly at the doctor with steady and cold black eyes. His hair was dark, brushed back like a cap of smooth enamel, and he was dressed quietly and very well in gray tweeds. His face, too, was dark and oval, handsome, but the eyes and the strong chin took away weakness from it. Carver eyed him narrowly. Pretty enough, this lad, but not just that. Hard, too. Who the hell was he?

The doctor said: "Sorry, gentlemen," and went out. A strong reek of antiseptic swept in around them from the whitewashed hospital corridor as he left. Carver wrinkled his nose against it, got up, and smoothed out his overcoat with the palm of one hand.

Sutorius sighed, hobbled forward to the desk, took his hat. The dark young man rose after him and crossed to the door, closed it quietly, without turning.

Carver stared after him. "Who's the Valentino, Abel?"

"Jack Miller?" The cripple looked surprised. "I thought you knew him. Everybody does. He was Frenchy's collection man in the racket before repeal."

Carver prodded a front tooth thoughtfully. "What's he in now?"

"A fine thing to ask me," Sutorius cackled. "How would I

know? He's quite a dancer; Frenchy told me once he intended to quit the game and work at that. I think he was at Harry Caddis' place for a while, doing tangoes."

"Let's go," Tammany growled. His little eyes seemed uneasy, moving away from Carver's. "I got that brief to prepare yet, Al."

Carver frowned at them faintly and followed them out. His coolness seemed to annoy Tammany; his red face swung back once across his shoulder, but he did not say anthing.

They went along the hall and through the glass doors at the end that led to the street. It was very cold outside; a late afternoon snow fell softly, and sounds from the avenue beyond came through it muted and dull. Sutorius limped down the steps first and got into the only taxi in line. Tammany crouched and entered after him, and as the door swung shut Carver grabbed the knob and drew it out again.

"You don't mind dropping me uptown?" he said.

Tammany grunted, settling back. Little Sutorius pulled in his wizened cheeks, smiled. "Honored," he said. He turned abruptly to his partner. "We can drop you at the office first, Al."

Carver lit a cigarette without offering them around. Smoke from it spiralled up slowly in the dim interior, and clung in small thick swirls to the icy windows. When they were stopped by a traffic light on Broadway, Tammany roused himself and looked at Carver.

"Now, don't get me wrong on this," he growled. "Whatever you police had against Frenchy he was a good client of ours and I liked him. I hate like hell to see some yellow rat plug him and get off scot free. You have any line on his killer?"

"Sure," Carver said. "We got a perfect description from Abel J. He had a camel's hair coat and a dark hat. We figure to pick him up any minute on that. Maybe he'll turn out to have two eyes and a nose too."

Tammany said ha, ha, very loudly, disgustedly. "That's funny as hell, Carver." He didn't speak again until the cab swung up on the Grand Central ramp, crossed it, turned into a side street and stopped. Then he barked: "See you later, Abel," and slammed the door after him.

The cab started again. Sutorius leaned forward and lit a slim brown panatela. He murmured, blowing out smoke: "I might like you if you weren't so clever, Carver. But really you annoy people—people who might be able to help you." His large, greenish eyes slid to Carver, with a bright glitter of something undefined far down in their depths. The something seemed to amuse him hugely. "And that, of course, makes them decide not to. You're left out in the cold when you might be

warming yourself at a nice log fire. I may say—"

Carver shrugged. "I get along."

Sutorius nodded gravely. "You do," he said. He looked through the window and puffed on his panatela; he didn't speak again. When the cab turned off Park and rolled the short block to Lexington, Carver stepped on his cigarette and got out.

With the door half closed behind him he stopped it with his hand, put his head back in. "That something important, Sutorius, you wanted to see me about this morning. It still on your mind?"

Sutorius stroked his narrow chin with yellow fingers, smiled above them. "You get along," he said.

Carver shrugged again and closed the door. He had taken three steps across the pavement when it opened and Sutorius peered out. He said: "Merely in the interests of justice, Carver. Jack Miller, the man you saw at the hospital, has a bungalow on Gibson's Island, in the Sound. I went up there with Frenchy three day ago, after I freed him on those income tax charges." He smirked, preened himself. "Which was really a nice piece of work, if I may say so."

"Not bad," Carver said. "How many jurymen you have fixed?"

"Tut, tut." Sutorius waved his hand easily. He leaned forward and clasped skinny fingers around one wrist, smiled up at Carver with dry, very bright eyes. "I proved to the satisfaction of a court of law that my client had made no money in the past five years."

Carver said: "Abel J. Sutorius, of the Legal Aid Society. Big hearted Abe. What'd he pay you with? Empty bottles?"

"That," Sutorious pronounced, smiling, "is beside the point. You asked me what Miller was doing. I wondered myself, when I found him on that island in midwinter. There's nobody else there from October until May. He had a charming girl with him—I caught a glimpse of her in the bedroom. She looked uncommonly like Mary Flood Harrington." The lean smile darted up once more at Carver; then Sutorius bowed, waved, closed the door. The cab rolled away. Carver stared after it until snow got on his brows and began to melt down over his cheeks.

He got a paper on the way to a restaurant, read it as he was finishing his coffee. De Villier's picture was on the front page under headlines that screamed blackly across its breadth, but Carver didn't pay much attention to that. There was a photo on an inner page, with a thinner black caption under it—a photo of a very beautiful young girl with large eyes, apparently a blonde. The leader under it was: *Harrington Girl*

Feared Kidnapped; Father Still Silent. Then, in smaller letters: *Parent Refuses To Interview Police; Believed Fearing For Girl's Safety.*

Carver read this through to the end, then stared for some moments, thoughtfully, at the ceiling. Later he paid his bill, walked over to a garage on Third Avenue, and took out his roadster.

His headlights picked out the sign fifty yards ahead. He slowed as he came to it, swinging the nose of his car slightly in. It said: *A. Johnson — Boats for Hire — 75c an Hr.*

At the far end of the long, low building set back from the road a rectangular line of window shone yellow. Carver turned his roadster in on the faint markings of the gravel and parked it before the stoop. It was bitterly cold, though without wind; snow still fell, heavy and soft, and under the flakes he could smell the salt strong freshness of the Sound.

In a room just off the porch a big yellow haired Swede sat at the center table, reading a paper. He asked: "Yah?" in a heavy, surprised tone when he saw Carver, took the pipe slowly out of his mouth and lowered his shoes from the table edge.

Carver knocked the snow off his coat before speaking. Then he said: "You know where Gibson's Island is?" A. Johnson nodded, watching him with great, candid blue eyes. Carver took a five dollar bill from his wallet and tossed it to him. "They told me at the Point that the ferry doesn't run there after October. One of the men said you could take me over. The five's yours if you do."

A. Johnson got up, his face puzzled. He said earnestly, and his voice was almost a roar: "But t'ere iss nobody t'ere now, in vinter. You know t'at? T'e island iss what t'ey call a summer resort. In vinter t'ere iss—"

"Nobody there," Carver said. "I got good ears, Axel."

A. Johnson smiled. "It iss Adolph," he said. "T'ere iss no axles in a boathouse, yah?" He rumbled laughter. "But I tak' you if you wantta go."

Carver grinned sourly, crossed with him to a door in the rear. There was a long damp shed off this, that smelled heavily of wet wood, with tiers of rowboats lined on either side, and the varnished sides of canoes glinting in the light. From somewhere below came the faint slap-slap of water.

At the end the shed lay open to the Sound, and they walked from it to a narrow descending gangplank that ran to a floating dock. Carver stepped into a long hooded black motorboat at the side, while A. Johnson busied himself with ropes.

Presently the motor purred and they slid away from the dock; be-

hind them on the black bosom of the water a wake of foam whiter than the snow stretched out from the stern in a fantastic V. Soon the lights on shore vanished under the soft, endless flakes; they sliced ahead faster, and spray stung Carver's cheek. He shivered closer into his coat, dug his hands deep into his pockets.

The Swede spun the wheel, and they veered. Carver could see nothing but the whiteness of snow, the blackness of water. The breeze here came fresher, icier, and they rolled slightly in long, gentle swells. After ten minutes something dark and shapeless loomed up on their right, and the Swede slowed, circled in with a soft grunt. In a moment the white bones of a pier jutted out before them, and, barely moving, they slid up to it.

After the boat was fast Carver got out and stamped his feet on the planks. He could see a vague shoulder of land beyond, with the faded green and yellow of summer bungalows bulking up on it like a stage scene backdropped to the snow.

"Yah," A. Johnson said, nodding his head. "Like I told you, mister. Vinter, t'en t'e people all go."

Carver grunted. "How big is it around?"

A. Johnson thought, stroking his chin. He said at last: "It might be two miles. T'ere is a road round from t'e pier. It goes past all t'e bungalows."

"I might be an hour," Carver answered. "Take it easy."

The Swede's face grew pleading, anxious. His heavy voice chased Carver down the planks. "That Sue faller, mister—Ed Vine—he talks on t'e radio tonight. Ay want to hear him. You coom back by t'en, eh?" He stared up from the boat like a huge child.

Carver growled: "Wait, squarehead," and went down the pier.

At its end he struck off to the left along the faint depression of a path. Bungalows were lined closely here along the water's edge, but he could see no lights, hear no sounds. He came to a blank space which in summer might have been the beach; the ground before him was even, white, unmarked, and on the farther side tree branches were laced blackly against the low solidity of the sky.

He plunged across this, shoes crunching through the hard surface of the snow. Past the trees on the far side he came out to another clump of houses, with the black sheet of the Sound below them, on the left. He had passed the first of these when he heard gun shots a distance ahead: three, perhaps four, the reports hammering over each other so fast that they were almost simultaneous.

Carver began to run. His shoe soles struck against the polished white sheen of ice and he lunged forward through the air, burying his shoulder in dry, cold particles of snow. Some of it sifted through his pocket flap to fingers numbed on the steel butt of his automatic. He cursed and got up, went forward more cautiously.

A second clump of bungalows swam up around him. But their windows were dark, and he could hear nothing. He passed the dirty, unlit window of a store and stopped suddenly on the ridge of a plank path. Sound came from somewhere, faint, fast, harmonized.

There was a small gray building on his left, isolated from the others. Its windows were dark as the rest. Carver crossed to it carefully and saw the reason. Steel shutters were locked over the panes, a dark shade pulled down across the panel of the front door. But the rhythm was plainer now: a saxophone's soft complaint, the muted syncopation of cornets. He put his hand on the knob and pushed, found it smoothly turning, silent, and unlocked.

The room inside was warm, brightly lit, but there was nobody in it. From the console cabinet of a radio in the far corner dance music swirled out drowsily. There were many floor lamps around, and a gas flame glowed in the brick fireplace. It was very well furnished. Cigarette smoke was thin in the air.

Carver closed the door softly and remained a moment careful and rigid against it. The room ran from side to side of the bungalow; there were two doors at the back, ten feet apart. Both of these were closed.

He took the automatic out of his pocket and walked across a deep rug on the balls of his feet, choosing first the door on the left. It opened to darkness and a stale smell of fried steak; before him the metal hood of an electric range glittered whitely. He closed it, crossed to the other, listened with his ear against the wood, heard nothing and jerked it out with a twist of his hand.

On a big bed in the center of the room a pajamaed girl was sprawled face down. She didn't seem to hear the sound of the door; she was making a funny noise deep in her throat, and there was blood on the cloth twined roughly around her right arm. Carver walked lightfooted to the side of the bed and looked at her with uncertain eyes. He was bending down when a voice behind him said: "Don't move, Carver."

Carver let his body drop across the girl, seeing in the bureau mirror the man who stood in the doorway. In the narrow space at the footboard Carver turned, waving his automatic through the bars.

"Check!" he said.

The man was Jack Miller, whom Carver had seen in the hospital reception room. Miller made a tired movement with his shoulders as he came fully into the room. There was a roll of cotton draped over his left arm and a white basin in his right hand. His eyes were cold and luminous against the olive face.

He said: "You shouldn't have done that, Carver. Been stupid if I'd had a gun."

"Sure," Carver said. "Only I could see you in the bureau mirror. I don't scare yet at basins."

Miller lowered his head slightly and looked at the mirror, at Carver. He shrugged again.

"Sit down," Carver said. From the bed the girl stared at him wide eyed. He kept watching Miller and backed around to her, bent one leg and squatted down. "How's the wound? Bad?"

She said it wasn't. Her voice, underneath a surface steadiness, struggled for balance. It ran up in little ripples of shrill sound that bordered on hysteria. "But you mustn't think that—that he shot me." Her gaze flicked to Miller, away. "It came from outside, through the window. We—"

Even before the report it seemed to Carver that something like the blow of an iron bar smashed against his shoulder, numbing it, knocking him to the floor. The girl screamed, and Miller flung himself to the light switch on the wall. Then Carver whirled, sprawling his body out flat as darkness snapped over the room, while from the window in back orange spurts of flame stabbed viciously through a deafening ricochet of sound that bounced against his eardrums like the beat of hollow metal hammers.

Carver fired rapidly, wildly, as his body rolled over and over out of direct range. Crouched by the bureau and protected by it, a narrow streak of gray showed him the unshuttered half of the window. It was empty now, silent. He did not fire again.

After a minute Miller said: "I guess he's gone. That's what happened just before you came. The shutter hinges must have been sliced through so he could pull it loose."

There wasn't much strength in Carver's arm. He believed a shoulder bone had been touched. The numbness was wearing off and his whole arm was beginning to ache. When he spoke it was an effort to keep his voice steady. "Don't put on the light. Any way out here, from the back?"

"Through the kitchen," Miller answered. The door behind him, pushed in, revealed the fainter darkness of the passage.

Carver said: "The girl better get out of this room," and waited until he heard the creaking of the bed springs. In the blackness he

crawled after the dim colored splotch of her pajamas through the small lobby that connected, through another door, with the kitchen and bath.

Sheltered in this, he got up and felt his shoulder with the fingers of his left hand. It was still throbbing, but he could detect no blood. As he moved something wobbled under it—the thick leather holster he carried at his armpit. He prodded a forefinger through the hole in the side where the bullet had been deflected, grunted. The damn' thing felt like it had smashed his shoulder. He asked Miller: "Where's the door?"

Huddled behind the stove, the girl watched them as they went out. He kept Miller before him as they rounded the house, and still ahead as they followed footprints on the snow a hundred yards in the woods. The prints were wide apart and deep, as if the man was running. Carver stopped, heard nothing, and turned back.

The girl was waiting in the kitchen for them when they got back to the house. They went in together and Carver said: "You can put on the lights. What's the story, Miller?"

"I told you," the other man said. His black eyes were grim, worried; he was watching the girl. "Five minutes before you came someone fired through the living-room window. They shot Mary—the girl—in the arm. I ran outside but I couldn't see anyone. I was too excited to notice if the shutters in the bedroom were safe. Then I went in again and started to fix her arm, and when I came out of the bathroom you were there."

Carver said: "Where does Sutorius fit in?"

Miller's face got careful, vacant. "I didn't think he did."

Carver turned to the girl. "You're Mary Flood Harrington?"

She didn't answer him. She looked at Miller, terror in her face and something else that Carver couldn't fathom. After a while she said: "Yes," with difficulty. Carver closed the outer door and followed them through to the living-room. There he looked at her wound and tightened the rough bandages that Miller had put on.

"That'll do till we get you to a doctor. Now get dressed, in the bathroom. We'll wait here."

She was gone five minutes. Jack Miller sat in a chair and put his elbows on his knees, his face between his hands. Once he looked up at Carver and started to speak. He was haggard now and not so handsome with the black gloss of his hair rumpled and the narrow mouth set deeply. He was very nervous; he kept rubbing the side of his cheek with one hand, pulling his lips in and out with the other.

"Give me a break on this, copper. I—"

"It's late," Carver said. "I'm cold. Speak your piece at the house."

Miller's mouth widened and turned down. He said very emphatically: "To hell with you." He lit a cigarette.

Music still droned from the radio in the far corner and Carver hummed the words until the girl came out again. As Miller took a coat from the closet Carver fixed cold eyes on it.

"Camel's hair," he said, pointing the gun. "That makes it bad. Frenchy De Villier's killer was dressed in one. You wouldn't have a revolver in one of the pockets?"

Miller shrugged, held up his arms to be searched. After a moment Carver stepped away from him and grunted: "All right. We're getting out of here. You first, Miller."

He followed them through the front door and turned off the light switch as he passed. Out on the path he put the automatic in his pocket, and kept his hand on the butt. Three paces behind Miller, he hummed a little going along; none of them spoke.

But when they came to the white ridge of the pier Carver cursed. The Swede was gone; the boat was gone. He looked out at the narrow stretch of Sound visible and let his lips droop ferociously. "Where in the hell—"

It was nine-thirty by his watch. When he saw that he whistled a long note, nodding his head. Ed Wynn, of course; he came on at nine-thirty and stayed until ten. And the lousy squarehead wanted to—

"Let's get back," he said irritably, without explaining. "My ferry won't come back until after ten. It's too cold to wait here."

They returned along the path, following their own tracks. Snow got inside Carver's shoes and began to melt coldly on his socks. He thought a good deal about Adolph Johnson, not nice thoughts.

As they turned off the path up from Miller's bungalow the girl stopped suddenly. Following her gaze, Carver saw a yellow streak of light staring out from the sagged shutter of the bedroom.

Miller turned, faced Carver. "The pop-pop boy," he said. "He probably saw us go."

Carver nodded, his lips thin. They crossed the porch, the girl behind them, and Carver tried the front door, opened it softly. He saw Abel J. Sutorius standing in the center of the room, his bad leg favored slightly, his long fingers caressing the sharp small angle of his chin. He was smiling, and at Carver's approach he didn't lose the smile.

"Ah," he said, eyes darting to

Miller. "Delightful, really, to see you here. I wasn't sure whether my hint—"

Carver didn't return the smile. He pulled the lawyer around to him and ran his fingers over the man's slight form, down to the steel brace that held up his withered right leg.

Sutorius raised his brows. He murmured: "Forgive me if I don't quite understand. You seem—"

Carver moved his eyes up at him. "I don't get it," he said, "and I don't like things I don't get, weasel. You gave me a tip this afternoon that the Harrington girl was here. Well, she was. Only I can't figure why you spilled it. It didn't mean money in your pocket."

The lawyer's thin smile, the mild gesture of his hand, were bland, self deprecating. "Perhaps it is too simple for your—shall we say unduly suspicious?—mind. I am, after all, a man of warm emotions, Carver; I am quite capable of doing the little in my power to assist a grieving parent. This morning I phoned you, intending to tell what I knew, but unfortunately before you came De Villier—" He looked sad, spreading his hands.

Carver said nothing. He swung the automatic slightly on his index finger, pinching his nose, watching Sutorius with narrowed, puzzled eyes.

Sutorius began again: "And I can assure you—"

Carver growled: "Don't bother. I wouldn't believe you anyway. Someone slammed off at me with a .45 a half hour ago. He came damn' near blowing me apart. I think you are kind of lucky you aren't carrying a gun."

"Violence!" Sutorius protested, in a very loud voice. He moved closer to the window as he spoke, looking horrified. "My poor young friend, your delusions run away with you if you seriously imagine that I would have anything to do with that." He stopped, gave an exclamation of pitying wonder, then added: "There is a limit, I remind you, to what a respectable professional man will endure at your hands."

His voice was rising higher, though his eyes were without anger; for an instant Carver was puzzled by that.

He went on: "There is a question, also, of your method of handling this case. When you keep this poor young girl away from her parent instead of restoring her to him as soon as humanly possible—" His shrug was nasty, a shade too elaborate, too careless; under cover of it his eyes darted to the clock.

Carver read it then. He cut in, sharp toned: "Get back from the window. Keep quiet. Sit in that chair facing the door and don't move until I tell you you can."

Sutorius' face got dark. He be-

gan: "I don't intend to—" Something in Carver's stare stopped his words; he wet his lips with his tongue, sat down.

Carver kept watching him. He told Miller: "You and the girl get back here, next to me. Where anyone that comes in won't see you."

They stood by the wall, to the left of the door. The pleasant sheen was gone from the cripple's face. It was naked and savage, the lips twisting silently. He started once to rise, then changed his mind, sat back. His hands were gripped very hard on the arms of the chair.

Three minutes went by—quietly, save for the quick, high breathing of the girl. At her side Carver began to worry at his lips. Sutorius expected someone, of course—someone he wanted to warn. Thus the loud voice, the stand near the window, where he had a better chance of being heard outside, the glance at the clock. If that someone had already heard. . . .

Even as he thought it a sliding, crisp sound came from outside, materialized into the brisk patter of steps on the porch. The door came back fast and hit Carver's shoulder; a big man shot past its end.

"Abel," he said, panting. "I got lost in those damn woods. I was afraid to follow them too close and I missed the path. But the boat was gone when I got to the pier. So they must have—"

The cripple's frozen face stopped him. He stuttered: "What—what—" and turned his head. Carver saw the beefy red face of Al Tammany glaring at him.

He waved his automatic gently. "Don't let me stop you," he said.

Tammany swore, whirled about at Miller and the girl. He looked back to Sutorius and heavy bluster came into his voice and his eyes.

"What the hell's the matter with you? Point your gun at that thug and not at me. By God, Carver, you've acted the wise boy long enough. I'll have your badge off you by morning. I'll—"

Some of the redness went out of his cheeks when Carver stepped up to him, and he went a pace backward, against the wall, wriggled there as if only that stopped him from retreating further. Carver prodded the automatic into his belly and smiled; it wasn't a nice smile. When he took a .45 out of Tammany's coat pocket the smile died on his lips and left them narrow and white.

Tammany put his hands before him and pushed at the air. He said: "Don't—don't look that way, man. I—"

Carver lifted the gun and smelled it, watching him from under his brows. His lower jaw came out a little and he brought his own automatic up to Tam-

many's chin, breaking the flesh. The fat man wiped dazedly at the blood.

Carver said in a soft voice without moving his lips much: "You fired through the window at me a half hour ago. I want to know why, Tammany. Now."

Tammany didn't seem to feel the pain. His eyes, veering to Miller, were bewildered. "I thought it was—"

Sutorius snarled, came halfway out of his chair. Carver put one hand against his chest and flung him back.

"There's a part of it missing," he said. "You told me today that the girl was here, Sutorius. You knew it for three days but didn't spill until De Villier was dead. Then you tell me. Why? So I'd come up and get her and Miller, take them away. Then you decide maybe Miller knows too much about this missing piece; you figure it will be better to have him shut up too. He might spoil your act. So Tammany tries twice to get him but he has lousy eyes. The first time he wings the girl, the second time he mistakes me for Miller. You couldn't do the shooting yourself; with your game leg you couldn't get away fast enough."

Sutorius' eyes glittered like green glass. He snarled: "You're insane. This girl was kidnapped —there's her abductor. He was holding her here for ransom. And instead of taking them in you stand here questioning my partner and myself. I—"

"I'll take them in," Carver said. "I'll do it right now if you tell me what you came here for. That's the part that's missing. What the hell are you here for?"

Sutorius smiled viciously. He said: "Maybe the country air. This island isn't private. As a matter of fact, I came to see if it really was the Harrington girl, I thought perhaps you hadn't taken me seriously and I wanted to do what I could to help if it really was she."

Carver didn't seem to hear him. His brows were wrinkled in a thoughtful, cold frown.

"You wanted the place left empty, Sutorius; that's it," he said, "and the first gag you thought up was for me to take Miller and the girl away. I guess you were afraid to tackle him alone. Then you decided to kill him, but Tammany spoiled that. He even messed things up when you sent him after us to make sure we left the island. When he saw us go off he was supposed to come back here and tell you. Then you'd hunt for the thing that's here—the thing you wanted so much you'd kill for it."

Tammany's glance, in panic, moved from Sutorius to Carver, to his partner again.

"Wait a minute. You're not getting it straight. Abel and I naturally wanted to free the girl, but we were afraid to speak while

Frenchy was alive. I thought he was in on the snatch with Miller. Then—"

"Shut up," Carver said. He used the gun again on Tammany's chin, lightly but effectively. "So now I want to know what that thing was, Sutorius. You're going to tell me."

"You don't need me," the cripple sneered. "You're smart. You're Joe Carver."

Miller came out from the wall, frowning.

"The whole thing's a joke, Carver. There's nothing here. I used it because—" He glanced at the girl; very pale, she was watching him, her hands clasped together. He repeated: "There's nothing here. We had no visitors until tonight. De Villier came three days ago, but he only stayed an hour. He left me—" He stopped suddenly.

Sutorius looked up at him with nothing human in his eyes.

Carver asked: "What'd he leave?"

"Two bags." Miller's voice was slow, queer. He was turning slowly, facing Sutorius, his dark face like stone. "I didn't look in them; I don't know what's inside. They're in the closet. I'll get them now."

"Uh-huh," Carver said. "Miss Harrington gets them. You stay here."

Miller stopped, shrugged. The girl went across to the bedroom and vanished inside. When she came out she had a small traveling bag in each hand. Sutorius' breathing was heavy.

"All right," Carver said. "I guess we'll start. You first, Sutorius. Tammany carries the bags."

The cripple ran a hand over his withered leg, winced. "I presume I may adjust my brace," he said nastily. Under Carver's eyes he bent and gripped his pants leg.

Tammany's lips wobbled with a queer sound; there was perspiration on his forehead but he didn't seem to mind it. He kept watching Carver and there was terror in his face. Carver was amused. He said: "Take a good look at the bogey man, Al. When they open the bags at Headquarters I'll have you and Abel J.—"

The girl saw it first. She screamed. Whirling, Carver had no more warning than the split second glitter of steel as Sutorius' hand swept out from the brace.

Then he felt a shock, a hot flash streak across his left side like the burn of a steel rod at white heat. A moment later he opened his eyes. He was lying on the floor, but he hadn't remembered falling. His left side was powerless, and gunpowder smelled acrid in the room. Tammany, with his frightened face, was bending for the automatic Carver had taken from him and

Carver's own gun, and Sutorius was by the wall, speaking to the others in a queer whine that didn't make words for Carver.

The room blurred in, ran together in Carver's mind like a dissolved shot in a film. It was very hard for him to think. He came unsteadily to his feet under Sutorius' gun, but his mind was queerly hazy.

He knew that when they left the house they turned left, away from the pier where the Swede would be waiting; he tried to tell Miller that but his voice only made mumbling noises. Later he fell—it seemed a long, long way—and his face touched snow; then he was walking again, and Miller's arm was holding him up.

It had stopped snowing, and the air was thin, cold, biting. Between gray clouds there were stars, small and bright. Presently his head grew clearer, though he felt very weak, and the pain from his side seemed unendurable. They were walking through woods that thinned gradually to an open space of beach, and on the left the Sound lay huge, black and silent.

They crossed the beach, and Miller helped Carver up to a thin row of boards that led out across the water. The girl went first, they followed, and behind them came the sounds of Tammany's heavy tread, and uneven clip clop of the cripple, Sutorius. Then they stood huddled by one side, the girl and he, with Sutorius and Miller before them, and Tammany jumping down, crouched, from the dock's edge.

By the tip of the pier a big launch was moored, with a glassed cabin running forward. But Tammany had not gone to this; he had dropped down further back, and there came to Carver heavy sounds like the beating of a mallet on wood. Later Tammany crawled back to the planks, his eyes veering swiftly to Carver and the girl.

"Hell, Abel!" he said. "You can't do it. Not to the girl."

Sutorius cursed him, waved the gun. He said: "Be very careful, Miller. You're getting a chance. When I tell you, cut the rope."

Miller nodded. Sutorius watched him narrowly, holding the automatic. "The girl first," he said. Miller lowered her to the boat, and then he and Tammany helped Carver forward, lifted him in after her.

They were in a small rowboat, layered by dirty snow. But as Carver looked down the snow turned colorless, and specks of it floated around. The launch motor purred and they slid out from the dock, a rope from their bow stretched taut to the rail of the big craft.

The girl was holding Carver's arm, peering into his face. She breathed: "What are you going to do? They're not—"

Carver didn't answer her. He tried to drag himself forward to the rope that connected with the launch. As he crawled water swept coldly about his ankles, filled the bottom of their boat almost to the seats. The nose of it wobbled unsteadily from side to side.

When he got to the rope there was no strength in his left arm, not enough in his right.

He tried twice to pull them up to the launch hand over hand, but his fingers slipped and his head jerked down against the gunwale. He lay there, panting. Behind them the dark spread of water grew wider, the shore line sank lower and lower into the gray sky. For a moment Sutorius smiled down at him from the launch, then turned and hobbled away.

Carver pulled again at the rope. It was like iron. Their boat was very deep in the water now; the tip of a wave slapped in over the wobbling side. Jack Miller came to the rail and bent from it, something that glittered extended in his hand. Carver's mouth twitched a little; he watched him, panting.

But Miller didn't use the knife. His body heaved once and their craft slid up to the launch. Then he bent and his arms went over Carver to the girl; her weight bore Carver down as she crept forward, and under the pressure water swirled up coldly to his armpits. He was struggling weakly, trying to grip the rail, when Miller caught him by the collar, drew him up and over, into the launch as easily as a child.

On a raised space before the cabin Tammany stood at the wheel, his back to them. Beside him Sutorius talked, pointing one hand forward. Tammany nodded and Sutorius stepped down to the deck, started to turn. He called: "All right, Miller. We're out far enough. Now you—"

He stopped very quietly, in the middle of a stride, staring at the girl; he didn't seem to see Carver behind Miller. In the faint light his narrow white face became wax. He said to Miller: "You fool," without much viciousness, without any force. "There's more than enough for you—for me, for Tammany. You can't hope to save her for ransom again. She knows too much. She dies with Carver."

Miller's body bent slightly, faced Sutorius, balanced and light on spread feet. He said softly—a kind of dreadful softness: "I told you back there it was a joke. It is, Sutorius. I didn't kidnap her. She's my wife."

Sutorius made a long sound with his lips. His face remained motionless and pale in the half light, the green surfaces of his eyes steady and depthless, but after the pause his arm rippled in to his body smooth and effortless and fast. Yet Miller's movement was faster; he stepped in

and his lean shoulders pivoted once, hard.

Carver heard the blow. Sutorius groaned, not loud. He fired once but he fired at the deck, as if he couldn't bring the gun up. Then Miller struck again; the tall slight body staggered back, balanced across the rail. It wobbled a little there, and after an instant, very gently, almost silently, slid out to the black water. Miller didn't try to catch him.

Tammany, at the wheel, made frightened sounds, words to which no one paid attention. Miller had picked up Sutorius' gun and covered the fat man.

Miller took over the wheel, throttled down to little more than drifting and told the others to get under shelter and fix up Carver.

In the cabin, after Carver's side had been bound up, Tammany talked freely enough. He was crying, his fat face distorted, like a baby's; he kept pulling at Carver's arm with pleading fingers.

"Sutorius got me into it," he said. "I didn't know he was going to kill De Villier until I got out in the hall and heard the shots; then I was in so deep that I couldn't back out. Later he said you'd seen me on the stairs, and that he'd tell you who it was if I didn't do what he said."

Carver nodded, tired. "It was a plant. I figured that. But how did he time things so nice?"

"He was a clever devil," Tammany shuddered. "He phoned you at the precinct just before De Villier came; then he told me to watch from the window, that you'd come straight across Fiftieth Street. When I saw you coming I nodded to him, and he told me to go over to the court house for some papers. I still didn't know what he meant to do—De Villier had just got there and they were talking about the tax case.

"Then, when I got halfway down the hall I heard the shots—I knew then what they meant, why he asked me to lock the door as I left. I didn't dare go back, but I should have. I just walked downstairs and out of the building on the Forty-ninth Street side. When he told me that you'd seen me leaving, and that you'd probably recognize my coat if he told you who it was, I was afraid to say anything; I had to do everything he wanted. God knows I didn't want to shoot Miller or the girl or you; but that devil—" He shuddered again.

Carver grunted. "He pulled it smart. With the door locked and the key gone, no one would figure he'd shot De Villier—it didn't occur to me that he might have had someone lock it for him. That was the angle of the story that didn't fit. He kept the gun in his brace, of course, like he did here; nobody would look there and he had a perfect story."

There was a bottle of Scotch on the table and Carver took a

long drink. Then his glance moved down to the two traveling bags at his feet, packed with neat stacks of currency row on row. "How'd he know De Villier had all this money?"

"We defended Frenchy on those income tax charges," Tammany answered. "He'd been our client for years, and Sutorius had been warning him not to keep books or bank his earnings. He said the government would get the boys on tax charges sooner or later. That was the reason he gave why Frenchy should keep all his earnings in cash, on him; maybe he had this plan in his mind all the time.

"After the case fell through—since nobody could prove where Frenchy's assets were—he told De Villier that the Federal men were watching him, and that he'd better put the cash some place where they wouldn't search. He went with Frenchy while he took the bags to Miller's place. Then things started."

The girl nodded. "They came up to us three days ago. I didn't want anyone to see me, so I kept in the bedroom, but he must have had a glimpse of me some way. But Jack closed the door quick and I suppose with all the paper talk he thought that I'd been kidnaped."

"Who didn't?" Carver growled. "Your father know you're married?"

"Yes." Her chin came up; her eyes flamed. "I met Jack three months ago when he was dancing at Harry Caddis' club. I think I fell in love with him the first moment. Last week we got married. I knew father would raise an awful row so I didn't tell him until it was done. Then father told me I'd disgraced the family, things like that. I told him that he needn't worry, that nobody would ever know we were married. It was foolish, of course, but he made me terribly angry. So I didn't tell any of my friends, and Jack kept it quiet, too. We came up here where we could be alone, where there'd be no one to bother us."

Carver grinned up at her. "You should be spanked," he said. "Happy?"

"Terribly," she smiled. "Jack never had a chance—I'm going to see that he gets one now. Oh, he isn't bad, Mr. Carver; it was only that money was so easy to make in bootlegging, and so hard to get other ways. But he had broken with Frenchy even before I met him; he didn't want to take the bags from him that day he came up to the bungalow until Frenchy almost begged him. He said he was in terrible trouble."

Carver sighed. "You gave me enough of that when your father wouldn't say where you'd gone or deny what some smart reporter doped out that you'd been kidnaped and that he was negotiating privately with the ransom gang.

We were all suckers enough to believe it, even Sutorius."

He took another drink of the Scotch and went on: "It was lucky for us that he did. He thought things out smart all through but he slipped on that and he was afraid to put Miller in the boat with us because he had only one gun, and he figured if the two of us rushed him and Tammany one of us might get to him. He didn't, of course, have to be afraid of Miller squealing, since he figured Jack would have to keep quiet to save his own hide. The plan was to cut the rope when we were out far enough, and let us sink. If our bodies were ever found it would look like we'd swamped escaping from the kidnapers. That would let him out clear."

Mary Miller got up, smiling at him. "Jack wanted to tell you about us back there, but I think he decided to wait—and then things happened. When they put us in the boat I was a little afraid, but I knew Jack would help us the first chance he got. Then when the water got so high—" She shivered slightly.

"It got higher for Sutorius," Carver said. He pulled a minute, reflectively, on his long nose. "Things work out funny. A big dumb Swede he never heard of wanted to listen to Ed Wynn. That was the only thing he didn't figure."

Mary Miller smiled. She held out her finger and Carver saw the wedding ring.

"That too," he said, grinning back at her.

WANTED—NEW BLOOD!

IT'LL BE INTERESTING to see whether the thousand-pound prize Collins, the London publishers, are offering in their "Dons Only" crime novel contest, produces any detective story academics to follow such master as Michael Innes, Nicholas Blake and Ronald Knox. It seems good writers have become scarce (or so they feel in England) and Collins are quoted as explaining, blandly, that they are "badly in need of some bright new blood."

It was Michael Innes, a don at Christ Church, whose interesting "Murder at the President's Lodging" established this vogue. But Innes is now spending most of his time on the writing of the last volume of the "New Oxford History of English Literature."

He is said to be certain, however, that great crime writers will still come out of the universities. "There is a young philosopher in Oxford," he says, "who has written a treatise on probability. He is also working on a detective story."

Most promising. . . .

THE saint's RATINGS

Who done it?

The guy with the gun. Or the broad with the blade. Of course we always know these days because we are right in there watching as each chronicle of crime unfolds. What is missing too often though, is the puzzle as to the killer's identity—or a sense of any suspense as the story advances. Without either of these vital ingredients, the only mystery remaining is mostly confused bafflement. Too, too frequently, violence is there for violence's sake alone. And the sex for equally insignificant reasons. Or if there is a "mystery" it is so unimportant to the story that we are bored by its revelation. Tighten down the screws on the old think-box, lads, and give us some more respectable work. We don't expect perfection for two-bits—but we at least demand competence.

OUR RATING SYSTEM:

- Three haloes: Outstanding
- Two haloes: Above average
- One halo: Passable reading
- A pitchfork: For the ash can

ASSIGNMENT—CARLOTTA CORTEZ, by Edward S. Aarons (Gold Medal, 25¢)

This is the weakest of the assignment series, which have been running steadily downhill. A preposterous plot supports a contrived story line that should earn a pitchfork. A heroic effort by the author keeps the book lively—but still preposterous—right to the bloody end.

THE BLOODY MEDALLION, by Richard Telfair (Gold Medal, 25¢)

At a quick glance you might think that Sax Rohmer wrote this book—since his name on the cover is bigger than the author's, and in red type to boot. But this is just a sly trick of the publisher to up sales. The volume can stand on its own legs as far as blood-letting, violence and sex goes. Falls apart towards the end as its fantasy of politics turns into a slapstick joke.

THIRD ON A SEESAW, by Neil McNeil (Gold Medal, 35¢)

If you can swallow the idea of a rugged shamus who can drink three quarts of hooch a day without getting drunk, and you enjoy a mixture of big business and girls, this is your meat. Otherwise, save your money for the haloes.

THE CAPTAIN MUST DIE, by Robert Colby (Gold Medal, 25¢)

More sly trickery here, since the title and cover illo of grim G. I.'s in a battle will suggest a war yarn to the unwary. Be wary, unwary. This is strictly a tale of civilian vengeance against a much hated officer. Fumbles its way from implausibility to boredom, and interest dies long before the captain.

PRELUDE TO MURDER, by Sterling Noel (Avon, 35¢)

Oh, no . . . NO!!

time for crime

by . . . Walt Sheldon

Joey would make a perfect fall guy if there was need for one. Young, and with a prison record too! Fine!

MY COUSIN who has studied psychology told me later that this Josiah Bloth had a "messianic" complex. If that means he was a mess, he sure was. I never thought he'd get halfway across the lobby when he first came into the Billings. I couldn't help thinking that goofy, gaunt look; that splatter of uncombed yellow hair would get him into trouble before he reached me at the desk. I took a quick look at Mutts Mattox and the Cribber over in the other corner.

I was in luck. Mutts and the Cribber were busily engaged in giving a hot foot to an ex-heavyweight known as Slapso Smith. So Bloth got to the desk unnoticed, shoved a couple of bright eyes at me and said: "I must be alone! This is a house of wickedness, and I must have quiet! Understand?"

"Sure," I said flatly. I inspected him closely. I looked at his dirty yellow hair, his pop eyes, his limp, baggy suit, and the black case he held in his hand. I told him: "Single room, buck and ahalf, double, two bucks." I told 'em all that. He'd find quiet

Walt Sheldon, who will be remembered for his stories of post-war Tokio and for his much discussed novel of the U. S. air forces in Japan, TROUBLING OF A STAR, *returns with this offbeat story of a man who, it was said afterwards, had a complex. But* was *he the mess they said? Well...*

all right at the Billings Hotel. Most of our guests made about as much noise as a deaf mute in a public library; this on account of their occupations ranging from going through traffic lights to grand larceny.

Bloth signed his name to the register.

And then, while I stared at him, I heard something. I heard a chorus of ticking coming from out of space.

Tick Tick Tick! Like that.

For a moment, I couldn't place it, then when I did figure it out, I wasn't quite ready to believe it. The noise was coming from Bloth, himself. From all over him.

I was about to say something, when, from the corner of my eye, I noticed a new customer coming in. He was a young fellow, not too well dressed, and he had a sort of wide open look to his blocked features.

He started toward the desk, and he hadn't taken five steps when there was a bloodcurdling yell from the other corner. I snapped my head that way and saw Slapso Smith in mid-air, his body bent in a stiff half circle. After that he banged face-down on the floor.

"Didja see that?" roared Mutts Mattox gleefully. "Ha ha ha, didja see that?" He had two hairy backed paws slapped over his midsection. And in between Mutts' roars, I could hear the Cribber's wheezy laughter. The Cribber was smaller than Mutts and had wrinkles all over him. "Didja see that?" blasted Mutts again. "We give 'im a whole box that time!"

On the floor Slapso Smith shook his punch-hammered head a couple of times, then looked up at Mutts and the Cribber. "Aw," he said in his wornout voice, "Ya shouldna done that."

That might have been the end of it, only this young fellow that had just come in, stopped in the middle of the lobby and turned around. "That was the wrong thing to do," he said very seriously, shaking his head at Mutts and the Cribber. "The poor fellow's obviously unbalanced."

I stared at the guy and saw him nipping at his lower lip, as though we were already sorry he gave way to an impulse, like that. Mutts Mattox stared at him, too. "Look," said Mutts, "Beat it before I push your face in."

The young fellow's mouth got slim then. He moved nearer to Mutts. "You can reach my face now," he said quietly.

Suddenly Josiah Bloth whirled around and started bouncing up and down on the balls of his feet. "Quiet!" he shouted: "How can I hear the hours ring if you're not quiet!"

The others turned and stared at him. Mutts parted his thick lips and said: "What the hell!"

Bloth turned again and yelled

at me: "I set them at the railroad station so they'd be right. But I must hear them when the hour comes!"

I, nor anybody else didn't get it. Before we could investigate, Bloth was pattering toward the door, swinging his little black bag beside him.

Meanwhile Mutts and the young fellow were leaning on their toes, facing each other again. All of a sudden, Mutts's right fist came up in a one way passage for the young fellow's jaw. There was a quick jerk of the neck, a little roll of the head and Mutts's fist passed harmlessly over one shoulder. After that one of the young fellow's arms cannoned out and sank into the middle of Mutts. After that Mutts backed away.

"Hey, cut it out!" wheezed the Cribber. He hiked a forty-five army automatic from under his coat, stepped forward and whipped at the young fellow with it. The young fellow went down with blood over his eye. Mutts lifted his leather heel and poised it over the youngster's face. "Don't!" I yelled, hardly without thinking. I'd seen a forehead fractured that way once. I slapped my hand down on the desk bell.

Ding!

In that instant Slapso Smith was off the floor. Slapso's arms were awfully long, and his shoulders were so wide that they added almost ten inches to his reach. He grabbed Mutts with those long arms, spun him around and sent a powerhouse one-two into his body. Mutts dropped his gun and staggered back. Mutts sparred around dizzily for a moment, then clutched the Cribber by the lapels and started to slap both sides of his face.

I took advantage of all this to hop from behind the desk, scoop Mutts's automatic up and point it at the whole business. "All right, break it up," I said, "You know we don't use that kind of stuff here."

Slapso let go of Cribber and looked at me kind of silly. The Cribber and Mutts just glared. "Look, fellows," I said soothingly, "Go on upstairs, will you? When you cool off you'll thank me for butting in."

The Cribber took a labored breath. "Wally's right," he said. He jerked his head at Mutts. "Let's go."

The three of them filed out as though nothing had happened. The Billings was a hotel for hoodlums, but it was the only joint where the hoodlums obeyed the house rules. That was how it got that way, I guess.

The young fellow came up and signed the register "Joseph Hoyt." I gave him a room key, and as he took it, I leaned over the desk. "Look, Joey," I said, "Remember those old western stories where everybody checked their guns at the doors of dance

halls so there wouldn't be no trouble?"

He folded his square brow into a couple of wrinkles and said, "Yes. But—"

"Well," I continued, "When you come into the Billings you check your nose outside. That's to keep it from getting into other people's business."

He gaped at me a few seconds, then frowned deep. "I get it," he said suddenly, "Thanks." He started to leave, then turned and faced me again. "You seem like a pretty square chap," he said. "Maybe you can help me."

I closed the register and slid it back across the desk. "Don't get me wrong," I said. "I'm not much on this good Samaritan business."

"Nothing like that." He waved his hand. "I want you to put me wise to something good."

"I don't play the horses."

"No, no — something *good*. You know what I mean. A proposition."

This time I let my eyes deploy and contact his. "Look," I said. "In the first place I only work here, and anything I run across I forget in an average time of two minutes flat; in the second place if I knew of anything I wouldn't tell a stranger, and in the third place I never heard of a phony proposition that *really* paid in the first place. What the hell does a nice kid like you want with a 'proposition' "?

Then he let out a laugh that was one part dime whisky and two parts wormwood. "What's a nice kid, as you call me, going to do when he can't get a job because he has a prison record."

My jaw did a dive. "A prison record?" I echoed. Once before I had felt like this; when my daddy broke down and told me there wasn't any Santa Claus. I knew stir birds ran to all types, but this kid, well, he didn't have a certain look—

"Yes, a prison record," he spit from a curled lip. "I worked in a big jewelry store. All the employees had lockers, and one day I left my keys in mine. I went back to get them, and while I was ringing for the watchman, somebody dropped a rope from the roof of the place, swung to an unbarred window, jimmied it and robbed the place. Naturally, I got it in the neck as an accomplice. I did a year—got paroled a few months ago. Haven't been able to get work since — not for long, anyway."

"That's a tough break," I said quietly.

He nodded. "So I want to find something good."

"Look, Joey," I said, "Why don't you keep on plugging. Don't go crooked." I hated myself for sounding like a preacher, but what the hell.

He answered me with a snort.

"Yeah, I know," I continued, "It's okeh to talk about it, but it's harder to do. Joey, if I had

the answer I'd write a book about it and make a lotta dough. Anyway, I'm damned if I'll help you be like these monkeys that parade in and out of here all day."

"All right," said Joey seriously. Then he smiled. "No hard feelings."

"Nope," I smiled back.

Joey went out, and I went into my usual routine of forgetting all about it.

I busied myself with the ledger. Somehow it showed an extra buck and a quarter, and if that was an actual surplus I could sink it, and buy me a ticket to the fights at the Armory. I was checking the thing for a third time when Mutts Mattox and the Cribber came back into the lobby.

"Wally," said the Cribber, between wheezes, "Lemme have some paper, will ya?"

I absent-mindedly shoved him a scratch pad that was on the desk. He said, "Thanks," and he and Mutts retired to the far corner of the lobby. They were there for some time in deep conversation. Finally the Cribber walked up, tossed the pad back and said, "Thanks," again.

Just about that time I'd found my error, I thought, and my hopes of seeing the tankers at the Armory bat each other around were starting to fade. I grabbed the scratch pad for some careful figuring on the side.

I started to make a figure 4 on the pad, when the pressure marks from the page the Cribber had torn off caught my eye. Ordinarily, I wouldn't have thought about them, but two printed words on the paper jumped right up and sang soprano at me. I rubbed some graphite from my pencil on my finger tip, then smudged it all over the page. What came out made me stare hard and throw the lines of my forehead into a small washboard.

I thought for a while.

"Say, Cribber," I called suddenly, "You wanna come here a minute?"

He came up to the desk and Mutts lumbered along with him.

"Look, Cribber," I said, "Can you use a good smart boy. A boy that puts up a good front?"

The Cribber crinkled his eyes at me. "What goes on?"

He knew that one of my favorite habits was not knowing something about anything, and this kind of surprised him, I guess. I said, "I wanna do somebody a favor."

"Sure!" Mutts boomed with sudden generosity. "Anybody you say is okeh is okeh with us, see?"

Not like that, the Cribber. "Who's the guy?" he asked.

I took a deep breath. "Joey Hoyt. The young fellow you just had a scrap with."

"Him!" roared Mutts.

"Sure," I said blandly. "So you *did* have a run-in with him. So all right. So that proves he's got guts, doesn't it?"

There was an awed silence for a minute, then the Cribber's eyelids came real close to each other. I didn't need mental telepathy to know what he was thinking. This dumb kid, Joey Hoyt, would make a perfect fall guy, if he needed one. Somebody to take a rap for him. So he said: "Well, I'm willing to give the kid a chance."

"Are you nuts?" Mutts put in loudly.

"Shut up," said the Cribber. He told me: "Get him here, will ya, Wally?"

I called in Bernie, the bellboy, sent him after Joey; Mutts and the Cribber retired to the corner of the room again. Just as the bellboy disappeared, Josiah Bloth came in once more, his messy blond hair bouncing with his steps. He was still carrying his little black bag.

Without preliminary, he walked up to me, shot me with his eyes and said: "You had better leave. You stand alone in a house of wickedness!"

"Come again?" I said, staring at him.

I could hear all those ticking noises again. He sank his hand into one of his baggy pockets and pulled out a cheap alarm clock. "Judgment," he said in hollow tones, "Will come at three o'clock!"

I almost had a good wisecrack figured out for an answer, when he whirled on his heel, marched straight to a far corner of the lobby, and sat down there quietly. In the other corner Mutts and Cribber hadn't even noticed him. So I shrugged and stuck my nose in the ledger again.

Judgment will come at three o'clock! Huh! I absently looked at the electric timepiece behind the desk. It was a quarter to three, Daylight Saving Time.

About then, Bernie, the bellboy led Joey Hoyt into the lobby. He stepped to the desk and I said to him: "I'm giving you a break, Joey. Those two men over there are Mutts Mattox and Cribber Jones. I think they've got something good for you."

"Yes?" His eyes flashed 100 watts. "Gee, thanks!" He never even asked me what made me change my mind. Swell crook a guy like that would make!

Joey Hoyt went over to the Cribber and Mutts, and I just sat back and smiled. Only I hadn't figured on Joey Hoyt being so dumb. I expected, when he found out what kind of a job they were going to pull, that he'd keep his mouth shut for the time being. But not Joey.

I was perfectly relaxed, noting vaguely that it was five minutes to three, and wondering why the Billings attracted screwballs like this Josiah Bloth, weren't con men and cut-throats bad enough —I was perfectly relaxed; and then all of a sudden there were big smokey crashes socking the

lobby walls and bouncing back again.

Terrific noise!

I looked and saw that Joey had backed up to a point behind one of the big carved pillars and was letting bullets and bright orange color fly from a cheap nickel plated job in his hand.

"Hey!" I yelled. From the corner of my eye I saw Josiah Bloth start to run across the lobby. He was yelling: "The judgment! The judgment!"

I looked back at Mutts and the Cribber. They had ducked back of a big sofa; the Cribber was blasting away with his forty-five, and Mutts had already tugged a snub nose detective from the Berns Martin speed holster under his armpit. It was awfully noisy, the whole thing.

Then, somehow, Josiah Bloth's screaming managed to get through all the bedlam. "Stop! Stop!" he yelled. "Stop the noise, or I'll blow us all up!"

Bloth was waving his little black suitcase in front of him. "It's a time bomb!" he screamed, "It's set for three!"

Mutts's snub nose made a loud blast, the way snub noses do.

"A time bomb!" shrilled Bloth.

Right then it must have sunk in. Mutts and the Cribber, and Joey, too, stared at the little blond guy. The white circles around his eyes were wider than ever. It got quiet.

"This is a house of wickedness!" Bloth said into the silence. "Judgment will come at three, when this bomb explodes! You must all be quiet! Do you hear? Quiet!"

I don't know how silence can get any silenter, but there it was. I gaped at the clock behind my desk. One minute to three!

And right then the big, swinging form of Slapso Smith appeared in the doorway. He said: "Hi. What's up, the fawth o' July?"

"Beat it, Slapso!" I yelled. "This guy's got a time bomb! Beat it! Call some cops!"

Slapso said: "Huh?"

I groaned and fixed my eye back on the second hand that was sneaking up on three o'clock. It got closer and closer, and a big thing in my throat got bigger. I stepped suddenly from the back of the desk. "I'm gettin' out of here!" I told anybody that was interested.

"Don't move!" snapped Bloth. "Don't move, or I'll blow it up now! You had your chance!" He raised the little black suitcase high above his head, as if to dash it to the floor. Maybe it would blow, and maybe it wouldn't—I didn't know that much about time bombs. Anyway, I didn't move.

I looked at the clock again. *Twenty seconds of three!*

"Hey, what is all this?" came Slapso's rough edged voice from the door.

On the heels of his words there was a sudden, sharp noise that made me go two feet nearer the ceiling. A sharp, ringing noise—bells—an alarm clock!

Slapso was suddenly bounding across the room, his two fists describing little patterns in the air before him. Bells! He ran right up to Bloth, feinted with his left, weaved a little, then shot a terrific blow to the man's jaw! Bloth started to sway, and the time bomb started to sway with him!

At that, Joey Hoyt leaped from behind his pillar and lunged for the suitcase. He caught it just as Bloth fell; stumbled a little, then, when he got his balance, whirled and faced Mutts and the Cribber.

"Throw your guns on the floor, and come out, or I'll blow the whole place to kingdom come!" he shouted at them.

"Hey! Look out! Look out fa dat bomb!" Mutts roared.

"Come on," said Joey firmly, "Toss 'em out!"

The two weapons skidded across the carpet. Mutts and the Cribber rose and put their palms in the air. Joey said to me out of the side of his mouth, "Get a bucket of water."

"The bomb—" I started.

"Go ahead, quick!" urged Joey.

I beat it into the washroom, filled the cleaning lady's bucket and got back in what I thought was one small part of a second. I looked at the clock. Three-O-One. Why the hell weren't we all blown up? I set the water on the desk and saw that Hoyt had both of his chums' weapons in his hand. He nodded at the black case which he had put on the floor. "Stick it in the water," he said to me.

"But—"

"Go on. It won't blow up. Yet."

I had the feeling of passing out, but Joey told me later that I took the bomb in a kind of daze and plunged it in the water.

It was a real bomb all right. We opened it later and saw the sticks of explosive; the battery and the clock mechanism. This was after I'd explained to Joey how I'd seen the diagram on the pad the Cribber handed back to me. The diagram that showed a rope swinging from a roof, and indicated a window marked "jimmy here". It was after Joey told me how he'd lost his temper when the Cribber outlined his "proposition" and mentioned the job that had framed Joey. It was also after the Cribber and Mutts had been carted away by a half dozen cops, and Josiah Bloth had been steered toward a psychopathic ward.

"Only," I said to Joey, "Why didn't the damn thing blow up at three? Wasn't it set for then?"

"Sure," grinned Joey. "Three o'clock, *Standard Time*. Bloth set

it at the railroad station, remember? He must have lost track when he got here and went on Daylight Saving Time again."

I stared at him. "How," I asked, "Did an unconscious potato like you ever notice that?"

"I told you I used to work in a jewelry store," said Joey. "I can't help noticing anything that has to do with time. I'm a watchmaker!"

And a damn good one too. So Joey's new employers tell me.

HAVE YOU A COMPLETE FILE OF THE saint?

HERE is your opportunity to purchase back issues of THE SAINT. But—the first issue, we're sorry to say, is all sold out. A few copies are still available of all others and they are yours by filling in the coupon below. THE SAINT is always star-studded by the best writers in the field. We are now offering these at BARGAIN PRICES—single copies at 35¢; three copies at $1; six copies at $1.75; and twelve copies at $3.25. When ordering, circle the issues desired.

KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, Inc.
320 Fifth Avenue, New York 1, New York

Kindly send me the copies of THE SAINT whose issues I have circled below. One copy at 35¢, three copies at $1, six copies at $1.75, twelve copies at $3.25. I enclose $_____ in full payment—no additional charge for postage.

AUG. '53; MAY '54; JULY '54; SEPT. '54; OCT. '54; DEC. '54; JAN. '55; FEB. '55; MAR. '55; APR. '55; MAY '55; JUNE '55; JULY '55; AUG. '55; SEPT. '55; OCT. '55; NOV. '55; DEC. '55; JAN. '56; FEB. '56; MAR. '56; APR. '56; MAY '56; JULY '56; SEPT. '56; OCT. '56; NOV. '56; JAN. '57; FEB. '57; MAR. '57; APR. '57; MAY '57; JUNE '57; AUG. '57; SEPT. '57; OCT. '57; NOV. '57; DEC. '57; JAN. '58; FEB. '58; MAR. '58; APR. '58; MAY '58; JUNE '58; JULY '58; AUG. '58; SEPT. '58; OCT. '58; NOV. '58; DEC. 58; JAN. '59; FEB. '59; MAR. '59; APR. '59; MAY '59.

NAME_____

ADDRESS_____

CITY, ZONE, STATE_____

PLEASE PRINT SM 96

night of witchcraft

by . . . Rafael Sabatini

The man was obsessed by his dignity — to the point where he would forgive almost anything, except what she'd done.

IF YOU scrape the rubbish-heap of servile, coeval flattery that usually smothers the personality of a monarch, you will discover a few kings who have been truly great; many who have achieved greatness because they were wisely content to serve as masks for the great intellects of their time; and, for the rest, some bad kings, some foolish kings, and some ridiculous kings. But in all that royal gallery of history you will hardly find a more truly absurd figure than that of the resplendent Roi Soleil, the Grand Monarque, the Fourteenth Louis of France.

I am not aware that he has ever been laughed at; certainly never to the extent which he deserves. The flatterers of his day, inevitable products of his reign, did their work so thoroughly that even in secret they do not appear to have dared to utter—possibly they did not even dare to think—the truth about him. Their work survives, and when you have assessed the monstrous flattery at its true worth, swept it aside and come down to the real facts of his life, you make the discovery that

---

Rafael Sabatini (1875-1950) was born in Jesi, a small city in the Italian marches known for its medieval walls, ancient cathedrals and crumbling palaces. Tall, with flashing eyes "and the features of one of his own Cesares," Sabatini was the author of BARDELYS THE MAGNIFICENT *(1906),* THE LIFE OF CESARE BORGIA *(1912),* CAPTAIN BLOOD *(1922),* SCARAMOUCHE *(1938), etc.*

From: THE HISTORICAL NIGHTS ENTERTAINMENT, 1923, Houghton Mifflin Company.
Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

the proudest title their sycophancy could bestow and his own fatuity accept—Le Roi Soleil, the Sun-King—makes him what indeed he is: a king of *opéra bouffe*. There is about him at times something almost reminiscent of the Court buffoons of a century before, who puffed themselves out with mock pride, and aped a sort of sovereignty to excite laughter; with this difference, however, that in his own case it was not intended to be amusing.

A heartless voluptuary of mediocre intelligence, he contrived to wrap himself in what Saint-Simon has called a "terrible majesty." He was obsessed by the idea of the dignity, almost the divinity — of kingship. I cannot believe that he conceived himself human. He appears to have held that being king was very like being God, and he duped the world by ceremonials of etiquette that were very nearly sacramental. We find him burdening the most simple and personal acts of everyday life with a succession of rites of an amazing complexity. Thus, when he rose in the morning, princes of the blood and the first gentlemen of France were in attendance: one to present to him his stockings, another to proffer on bended knee the royal garters, a third to perform the ceremony of handing him his wig, and so on until the toilette of his plump, not unhandsome person was complete. You miss the incense, you feel that some noble thurifer should have fumigated him at each stage. Perhaps he never thought of it.

The evil fruits of his reign—evil, that is to say, from the point of view of his order, which was swept away as so much anachronistic rubbish—did not come until a hundred years later. In his own day France was great, and this not because but in spite of him. After all, he was not the absolute ruler he conceived himself. There were such capable men as Colbert and Louvois at the King's side; there was the great genius of France which manifests itself when and as it will, whatever the regime—and there was Madame de Montespan to whose influence not a little of Louis' glory may be ascribed, since the most splendid years of his reign were those between 1668 and 1678 when she was *maitresse en titre* and more than Queen of France. The women played a great part at the Court of Louis XIV, and those upon whom he turned his dark eyes were in the main as wax under the solar rays of the Sun-King. But Madame de Montespan had discovered the secret of reversing matters, so that in her hands it was the King who became as wax for her modelling. It is with this secret—a page of the secret history of France—that we are here concerned.

Françoise Athénaïs de Tonnay-Charente had come to Court in

1660 as a maid of honour to the Queen. Of a wit and grace to match her superb beauty, she was also of a perfervid piety, a daily communicant, a model of virtue to all maids of honour. This until the devil tempted her. When that happened she did not merely eat an apple; she devoured an entire orchard. Pride and ambition brought about her downfall. She shared the universal jealousy of which Louise de la Vallière was the victim, and coveted the honours and the splendour by which that unfortunate favourite was surrounded.

Not even her marriage with the Marquis de Montespan some three years after her coming to Court sufficed to overcome the longings born of her covetousness and ambition. And then, when the Sun-King looked with favour upon her opulent charms, when at last she saw the object of her ambition within reach, that husband of hers went very near to wrecking everything by his unreasonable behaviour. This preposterous marquis had the effrontery to dispute his wife with Jupiter, was so purblind as not to appreciate the honour the Sun-King proposed to do him.

In putting it thus, I but make myself the mouthpiece of the Court.

When Montespan began to make trouble by railing furiously against the friendship of the King for his wife, his behaviour so amazed the King's cousin, Mademoiselle de Montpensier, that she called him "an extravagant and extraordinary man." To his face she told him that he must be mad to behave in this fashion; and so incredibly distorted were his views, that he did not at all agree with her. He provoked scenes with the King, in which he quoted Scripture, made apposite allusions to King David which were in the very worst taste, and even ventured to suggest that the Sun-King might have to reckon with the judgment of God. If he escaped a *lettre de cachet* and a dungeon in the Bastille, it can only have been because the King feared the further spread of a scandal injurious to the sacrosanctity of his royal dignity.

The marchioness fumed in private and sneered in public. When Mademoiselle de Montpensier suggested that for his safety's sake she should control her husband's antics, she expressed her bitterness.

"He and my parrot," she said, "amuse the Court to my shame."

In the end, finding that neither by upbraiding the King nor by beating his wife could he prevail, M. de Montespan resigned himself after his own fashion. He went into widower's mourning, dressed his servants in black, and came ostentatiously to Court in a mourning coach to take ceremonious leave of his friends. It was an affair that profoundly ir-

ritated the Sun-King, and very nearly made him ridiculous.

Thereafter Montespan abandoned his wife to the King. He withdrew first to his country seat, and, later, from France, having received more than a hint that Louis was intending to settle his score with him. By that time Madame de Montespan was firmly established as *maitresse en titre,* and in January of 1669 she gave birth to the Duke of Maine, the first of the seven children she was to bear the King. Parliament was to legitimize them all, declaring them royal children of France, and the country was to provide titles, dignities, and royal rent-rolls for them and their heirs for ever. Do you wonder that there was a revolution a century later, and that the people, grown weary of the parasitic anachronism of royalty, should have risen to throw off the intolerable burden it imposed upon them?

The splendour of Madame de Montespan in those days was something the like of which had never been seen at the Court of France. On her estate of Clagny, near Versailles, stood now a magnificent château. Louis had begun by building a country villa, which satisfied her not at all.

"That," she told him, "might do very well for an opera-girl," whereupon the infatuated monarch had no alternative but to command its demolition, and call in the famous architect, Mansard, to erect in its place an ultra-royal residence.

At Versailles itself, whilst the long-suffering Queen had to be content with ten rooms on the second floor, Madame de Montespan was installed in twice that number on the first; and whilst a simple page sufficed to carry the Queen's train at Court, nothing less than the wife of a marshal of France must perform the same office for the favourite. She kept royal state as few queens have ever kept it. She was assigned a troop of royal bodyguards for escort, and when she travelled there was a never-ending train to follow her six-horse coach, and officers of State came to receive her with royal honours wherever she passed.

In her immeasurable pride she became a tyrant, even over the King himself.

"Thunderous and triumphant," Madame de Sévigné describes her in those days when the Sun-King was her utter and almost timid slave.

But constancy is not a Jovian virtue. Jupiter grew restless, and then, shaking off all restraint, plunged into inconstancy of the most scandalous and flagrant kind. It is doubtful if the history of royal amours, with all its fecundity, can furnish a parallel. Within a few months, Madame de Soubise, Mademoiselle de Rochefort-Théobon, Madame de

Louvigny, Madame de Ludres, and some lesser ones passed in rapid succession through the furnace of the Sun-King's affection—which is to say, through the royal bed—and at last the Court was amazed to see the Widow Scarron, who had been appointed governess to Madame de Montespan's royal children, empanoplied in a dignity and ceremony that left no doubt on the score of her true position at Court.

And so, after seven years of absolute sway in which homage had been paid her almost in awe by noble and simple alike, Madame de Montespan, neglected now by Louis, moved amid reflections of that neglect, with arrogantly smiling lips and desperate rage in her heart. She sneered openly at the royal lack of taste, allowed her barbed wit to make offensive sport with the ladies who supplanted her; yet, ravaged by jealousy, she feared for herself the fate which through her had overtaken La Vallière.

That fear was with her now as she sat in the window embrasure, hell in her heart and a reflection of it in her eyes, as, fallen almost to the rank of a spectator in that comedy wherein she was accustomed to the leading part, she watched the shifting, chattering, glittering crowd. And as she watched, her line of vision was crossed to her undoing by the slender, well-knit figure of de Vanens, who, dressed from head to foot in black, detached sharply from that dazzling throng. His face was pale and saturnine, his eyes dark, very level, and singularly piercing. Thus his appearance served to underline the peculiar fascination which he exerted, the rather sinister appeal which he made to the imagination.

This young Provençal nobleman was known to dabble in magic, and there were one or two dark passages in his past life of which more than a whisper had gone abroad. Of being a student of alchemy, a "philosopher"—that is to say, a seeker after the philosopher's stone, which was to effect the transmutation of metals—he made no secret. But if you taxed him with demoniacal practices he would deny it, yet in a way that carried no conviction.

To this dangerous fellow Madame de Montespan now made appeal in her desperate need.

Their eyes met as he was sauntering past, and with a lazy smile and a languid wave of her fan she beckoned him to her side.

"They tell me, Vanens," said she, "that your philosophy succeeds so well that you are transmuting copper into silver."

His piercing eyes surveyed her, narrowing; a smile flickered over his thin lips.

"They tell you the truth," he said. "I have cast a bar which

has been purchased as good silver by the Mint."

Her interest quickened. "By the Mint!" she echoed, amazed. "But, then, my friend—" She was breathless with excitement. "It is a miracle."

"No less," he admitted. "But there is the greater miracle to come—the transmutation of base metal into gold."

"And you will perform it?"

"Let me but conquer the secret of solidifying mercury, and the rest is naught. I shall conquer it, and soon."

He spoke with easy confidence, a man stating something that he knew beyond the possibility of doubt. The Marquise became thoughtful. She sighed.

"You are the master of deep secrets, Vanens. Have you none that will soften flinty hearts, make them responsive?"

He considered this woman whom Saint-Simon has called "beautiful as the day," and his smile broadened.

"Look in your mirror for the alchemy needed there," he bade her.

Anger rippled across the perfect face. She lowered her voice:

"I have looked—in vain. Can you not help me, Vanens, you who know so much?"

"A love-philtre?" said he, and hummed. "Are you in earnest?"

"Do you mock me with that question? Is not my need proclaimed for all to see?"

Vanens became grave.

"It is not an alchemy in which myself I dabble," he said slowly. "But I am acquainted with those who do."

She clutched his wrist in her eagerness.

"I will pay well," she said.

"You will need to. Such things are costly." He glanced round to see that none was listening, then bending nearer: "There is a sorceress named La Voisin in the Rue de la Tannerie, well known as a fortune-teller to many ladies of the Court, who at a word from me will do your need."

La Montespan turned white. The piety in which she had been reared—the habits of which clung to her despite the irregularity of her life—made her recoil before the thing that she desired. Sorcery was of the devil. She told him so. But Vanens laughed.

"So that it be effective . . ." said he with a shrug.

And then across the room floated a woman's trilling laugh. She looked in the direction of the sound and beheld the gorgeous figure of the King bending—yet haughty and condescending even in adoration — over handsome Madame de Ludres. Pride and ambition rose up in sudden fury to trample on religious feeling. Let Vanens take her to this witch of his, for be the aid what it might, she must have it.

And so, one dark night late in the year, Louis de Vanens handed

a masked and muffled lady from a coach at the corner of the Rue de la Tannerie, and conducted her to the house of La Voisin.

The door was opened for them by a young woman of some twenty years of age—Marguerite Monvoisin, the daughter of the witch—who led them upstairs to a room that was handsomely furnished and hung with fantastic tapestry of red designs upon a black ground—designs that took monstrous shapes in the flickering light of a cluster of candles. Black curtains parted, and from between them stepped a short, plump woman, of a certain comeliness, with two round black beads of eyes. She was fantastically robed in a cloak of crimson velvet, lined with costly furs and closely studded with double-headed eagles in fine gold, which must have been worth a prince's ransom; and she wore red shoes on each of which there was the same eagle design in gold.

"Ah, Vanens!" she said familiarly.

He bowed.

"I bring you," he announced, "a lady who has need of your skill."

And he waved a hand towards the tall cloaked figure at his side.

La Voisin looked at the masked face.

"Velvet faces tell me little, Madame la Marquise," she said calmly. "Nor, believe me, will the King look at a countenance that you conceal from me."

There was an exclamation of surprise and anger from Madame de Montespan. She plucked off her mask.

"You knew me?"

"Can you wonder?" asked La Voisin, "since I have told you what you carry concealed in your heart?"

Madame de Montespan was as credulous as only the very devout can be.

"Since that is so, since you know already what I seek, tell me can you procure it for me?" she asked in a fever of excitement. "I will pay well."

La Voisin smiled darkly.

"Obdurate, indeed, is the case that will not yield to such medicine as mine," she said. "Let me consider first what must be done. In a few days I shall bring you word. But have you courage for a great ordeal?"

"For any ordeal that will give me what I want."

"In a few days, then, you shall hear from me," said the witch, and so dismissed the great lady.

Leaving a heavy purse behind her, as Vanens had instructed her, the marchioness departed with her escort. And there, with that initiation, as far as we can ascertain, ended Louis de Vanens's connection with the affair.

At Clagny Madame de Montespan waited for three days in a fever of impatience for the

coming of the witch. But when at last La Voisin presented herself, the proposal that she had to make was one before which the marchioness recoiled in horror and some indignation.

The magic that La Voisin suggested involved a coadjutor, the Abbé Guibourg, and the black mass to be celebrated by him. Madame de Montespan had heard something of these dread sacrificial rites to Satan; sufficient to fill her with loathing and disgust of the white-faced, beady-eyed woman who dared to insult her by the proposal. She fumed and raged a while, and even went near to striking La Voisin, who looked on with inscrutable face and stony, almost contemptuous, indifference. Before that impenetrable, almost uncanny, calm, Madame de Montespan's fury at last abated. Then the urgency of her need becoming paramount, she desired more clearly to be told what would be expected of her. What the witch told her was more appalling than anything she could have imagined. But La Voisin argued:

"Can anything be accomplished without cost? Can anything be gained in this life without payment of some kind?"

"But the price of this is monstrous!" Madame de Montespan protested.

"Measure it by the worldly advantages to be gained. They are not small, madame. To enjoy boundless wealth, boundless power, and boundless honour, to be more than queen—is not all this worth some sacrifice?"

To Madame de Montespan it must have been worth any sacrifice in this world or the next, since in the end she conquered her disgust, and agreed to lend herself to this horror.

Three masses, she was told, would be necessary to ensure success, and it was determined that they should be celebrated in the chapel of the Château de Villebousin, where Guibourg had been almoner, to which he had access, and which was at the time untenanted.

The château was a gloomy mediæval fortress, blackened by age, and standing, surrounded by a moat, in a lonely spot some two miles to the south of Paris. Thither on a dark, gusty night of March came Madame de Montespan, accompanied by her confidential waiting-woman, Mademoiselle Desœillets. They left the coach to await them on the Orleans road, and thence, escorted by a single male attendant, they made their way by a rutted, sodden path towards the grim castle looming faintly through the enveloping gloom.

The wind howled dismally about the crenellated turrets; and a row of poplars, standing like black, phantasmal guardians of the evil place, bent groaning before its fury. From the running

waters of the moat, swollen by recent rains, came a gurgling sound that was indescribably wicked.

Desœillets was frightened by the dark, the desolate loneliness and eeriness of the place; but she dared utter no complaint as she stumbled forward over the uneven ground, through the gloom and the buffeting wind, compelled by the suasion of her mistress's imperious will. Thus, by a drawbridge spanning dark, oily waters, they came into a vast courtyard and an atmosphere as of mildew. A studded door stood ajar, and through the gap, from a guiding beacon of infamy, fell a rhomb of yellow light, suddenly obscured by a squat female figure when the steps of the marchioness and her companions fell upon the stones of the yard.

It was La Voisin who stood on the threshold to receive her client. In the stone-flagged hall behind her the light of a lantern revealed her daughter, Marguerite Monvoisin, and a short, crafty-faced, misshapen fellow in black homespun and a red wig—a magician named Lesage, one of La Voisin's coadjustors, a rogue of some talent who exploited the witches of Paris to his own profit.

Leaving Leroy — the marchioness's male attendant—below in this fellow's company, La Voisin took up a candle and lighted Madame de Montespan up the broad stone staircase, draughty and cold, to the ante-room of the chapel on the floor above. Mademoiselle Desœillets followed closely and fearfully, and Marguerite Monvoisin came last.

They entered the ante-room, a spacious chamber, bare of furniture save for an oaken table in the middle, some faded and mildewed tapestries, and a cane-backed settle of twisted walnut over against the wall. An alabaster lamp on the table made an island of light in that place of gloom, and within the circle of its feeble rays stood a gross old man of some seventy years of age in sacerdotal garments of unusual design: the white alb worn over a greasy cassock was studded with black fir-cones; the stole and maniple were of black satin, with fir-cones wrought in yellow thread.

His inflamed countenance was of a revolting hideousness: his cheeks were covered by a network of blue veins, his eyes squinted horribly, his lips vanished inwards over toothless gums, and a fringe of white hair hung in matted wisps from his high, bald crown. This was the infamous Abbé Guibourg, sacristan of St. Denis, an ordained priest who had consecrated himself to the service of the devil.

He received the great lady with a low bow which, despite herself, she acknowledged by a shudder. She was very pale, and her eyes were dilating and preternaturally

bright. Fear began to possess her, yet she suffered herself to be ushered into the chapel, which was dimly illumined by a couple of candles standing beside a basin on a table. The altar light had been extinguished. Her maid would have hung back, but that she feared to be parted from her mistress. She passed in with her in the wake of Guibourg, and followed by La Voisin, who closed the door, leaving her daughter in the ante-room.

Although she had never been a participant in any of the sorceries practised by her mother, yet Marguerite was fully aware of their extent, and more than guessed what horrors were taking place beyond the closed doors of the chapel. The very thought of them filled her with loathing and disgust as she sat waiting, huddled in a corner of the settle. And yet when presently through the closed doors came the drone of the voice of that unclean celebrant, to blend with the whine of the wind in the chimney, Marguerite, urged by a morbid curiosity she could not conquer, crept shuddering to the door, which directly faced the altar, and going down on her knees applied her eye to the keyhole.

What she saw may very well have appalled her considering the exalted station of Madame de Montespan. She beheld the white, sculptural form of the royal favourite lying at full length supine upon the altar, her arms outstretched, holding a lighted candle in each hand. Immediately before her stood the Abbé Guibourg, his body screening the chalice and its position from the eye of the watching girl.

She heard the whine of his voice pattering the Latin of the mass, which he was reciting backwards from the last gospel; and occasionally she heard responses muttered by her mother, who with Mlle. Desœillets was beyond Marguerite's narrow range of vision.

Apart from the interest lent to the proceedings by the presence of the royal favourite the affair must have seemed now very stupid and pointless to Marguerite, although she would certainly not have found it so had she known enough Latin to understand the horrible perversion of the Credo. But when the Offertory was reached matters suddenly quickened. In stealing away from the door, she was no more than in time to avoid being caught spying by her mother, who now issued from the chapel.

La Voisin crossed the ante-room briskly and went out.

Within a very few minutes she was back again, her approach now heralded by the feeble, quavering squeals of a very young child.

Marguerite Monvoisin was sufficiently acquainted with the ghastly rites to guess what was

impending. She was young, and herself a mother. She had her share of the maternal instinct alive in every female animal—with the occasional exception of the human pervert—and the hoarse, plaintive cries of that young child chilled her to the soul with horror. She felt the skin roughening and tightening upon her body, and a sense of physical sickness overcame her. That and the fear of her mother kept her stiff and frozen in an angle of the settle until La Voisin had passed through and re-entered the chapel bearing that piteous bundle in her arms.

Then, when the door had closed again, the girl, horrified and fascinated, sped back to watch. She saw that unclean priest turn and receive the child from La Voisin. As it changed hands its cries were stilled.

Guibourg faced the altar once more, that little wisp of humanity that was but a few days old held now aloft, naked, in his criminal hands. His muttering, slobbering voice pronouncing the words of that demoniac consecration reached the ears of the petrified girl at the keyhole.

"Ashtaroth, Asmodeus, Princes of Affection, I conjure you to acknowledge the sacrifice I offer to you of this child for the things I ask of you, which are that the King's love for me shall be continued, and that honoured by princes and princesses nothing shall be denied me of all that I may ask."

A sudden gust of wind smote and rattled the windows of the chapel and the ante-room, as if the legions of hell had flung themselves against the walls of the château. There was a rush and clatter in the chimney of the ante-room's vast, empty fireplace, and through the din Marguerite, as her failing limbs sank under her and she slithered down in a heap against the chapel door, seemed to hear a burst of exultantly cruel satanic laughter. With chattering teeth and burning eyes she sat huddled, listening in terror. The child began to cry again, more violently, more piteously; then, quite suddenly, there was a little choking cough, a gurgle, the chink of metal against earthenware, and silence.

When some moments later the squat figure of La Voisin emerged from the chapel, Marguerite was back in the shadows, hunched on the settle to which she had crawled. She saw that her mother now carried a basin under her arm, and she did not need the evidence of her eyes to inform her of the dreadful contents that the witch was bearing away in it.

Meanwhile in the chapel the ineffably blasphemous rites proceeded. To the warm human blood which had been caught in the consecrated chalice, Guibourg had added, among other foulnesses, powdered cantharides, the

dust of desiccated moles, and the blood of bats. By the addition of flour he had wrought the ingredients into an ineffable paste, and over this, through the door, which La Voisin had left ajar, Marguerite heard his voice pronouncing the dread words of Transubstantiation.

Marguerite's horror mounted until it threatened to suffocate her. It was as if some hellish miasma, released by Guibourg's monstrous incantations, crept through to permeate and poison the air she breathed.

It would be a half-hour later when Madame de Montespan at last came out. She was of a ghastly pallor, her limbs shook and trembled under her as she stepped forth, and there was a wild horror in her staring eyes. Yet she contrived to carry herself almost defiantly erect, and she spoke sharply to the half-swooning Desœillets, who staggered after her.

She took her departure from that unholy place bearing with her the most compounded of devilish ingredients—which when dried and reduced to powder was to be administered to the King to ensure the renewal of his failing affection for her.

The marchioness contrived that a creature of her own, an officer of the buttery in her pay, should introduce it into the royal soup. The immediate and not unnatural result was that the King was taken violently ill, and Madame de Montespan's anxiety and suspense were increased thereby. On his recovery, however, it would seem that the demoniac sacrament—thrice repeated by then—had not been in vain.

The sequel, indeed, appeared to justify Madame de Montespan's faith in sorcery, and to compensate her for all the horror to which in her despair she had submitted. Madame de Ludres found herself coldly regarded by the convalescent King. Very soon she was discarded, the Widow Scarron neglected, and the fickle monarch was once more at the feet of the lovely marchioness, her utter and devoted slave.

Thus was Madame de Montespan "thunderously triumphant" once more, and established as firmly as ever in the Sun-King's favour. Madame de Sévigné, in speaking of this phase of their relations, dilates upon the completeness of the reconciliation, and tells us that the ardour of the first years seemed now to have returned. And for two whole years it continued thus. Never before had Madame de Montespan's sway been more absolute, no shadow came to trouble the serenity of her rule.

But it proved, after all, to be no more than the last flare of an expiring fire that was definitely quenched at last, in 1679, by

Mademoiselle de Fontanges. A maid of honour to madame, she was a child of not more than eighteen years, fair and flaxen, with pink cheeks and large, childish eyes; and it was for this doll that the regal Montespan now found herself discarded.

Honours rained upon the new favourite. Louis made her a duchess with an income of 20,000 livres, and deeply though this may have disgusted his subjects, it disgusted Madame de Montespan still more. Blinded by rage she openly abused the new duchess, and provoked a fairly public scene with Louis, in which she gave him her true opinion of him with a disturbing frankness.

"You dishonour yourself," she informed him among other things. "And you betray your taste when you make love to a pink-and-white doll, a little fool that has no more wit nor manners than if she were painted on canvas!" Then, with an increase of scorn, she delivered herself of an unpardonable apostrophe: "You, a king, to accept the inheritance of that chit's rustic lovers!"

He flushed and scowled upon her.

"That is an infamous falsehood!" he exclaimed. "Madame, you are unbearable!" He was very angry, and it infuriated him the more that she should stand so coldly mocking before an anger that could bow the proudest heads in France. "You have the pride of Satan, your greed is insatiable, your domineering spirit utterly insufferable, and you have the most false and poisonous tongue in the world!"

Her brutal answer bludgeoned that high divinity to earth.

"With all my imperfections," she sneered, "at least I do not smell as badly as you do!"

It was an answer that extinguished her last chance. It was fatal to the dignity, to the "terrible majesty" of Louis. It stripped him of all divinity, and revealed him authoritatively as intensely and even unpleasantly human. It was beyond hope of pardon.

His face turned the colour of wax. A glacial silence hung over the agonized witnesses of that royal humiliation. Then, without a word, in a vain attempt to rescue the dignity she had so cruelly mauled, he turned, his red heels clicked rapidly and unsteadily across the polished floor, and he was gone.

When Madame de Montespan realized exactly what she had done, nothing but rage remained to her—rage and its offspring, vindictiveness. The Duchess of Fontanges must not enjoy her victory, nor must Louis escape punishment for his faithlessness. La Voisin should afford her the means to accomplish this. And so she goes once more to the Rue de la Tannerie.

Now, the matter of Madame de

Montespan's present needs was one in which the witches were particularly expert. Were you troubled with a rival, did your husband persist in surviving your affection for him, did those from whom you had expectations cling obstinately and inconsiderately to life, the witches by incantations and the use of powders—in which arsenic was the dominant charm—could usually put the matter right for you. Indeed, so wide and general was the practice of poisoning become, that the authorities, lately aroused to the fact by the sensational revelations of the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, had set up in this year 1670 the tribunal known as the Chambre Ardente to inquire into the matter, and to conduct prosecutions.

La Voisin promised help to the marquise. She called in another witch of horrible repute, named La Filastre, her coadjutor Lesage, and two expert poisoners, Romani and Bertrand, who devised an ingenious plot for the murder of the Duchess of Fontanges. They were to visit her, Romani as a cloth merchant, and Bertrand as his servant, to offer her their wares, including some Grenoble gloves, which were the most beautiful gloves in the world and unfailingly irresistible to ladies. These gloves they prepared in accordance with certain magical recipes in such a way that the duchess, after wearing them, must die a lingering death in which there could be no suspicion of poisoning.

The King was to be dealt with by means of a petition steeped in similar powders, and should receive his death by taking it into his hands. La Voisin herself was to go to St. Germain to present this petition on Monday, March 13, one of those days on which, according to ancient custom, all comers were admitted to the royal presence.

Thus they disposed. But Fate was already silently stalking La Voisin.

It is to the fact that an obscure and vulgar woman had drunk one glass of wine too many three months earlier that the King owed his escape.

If you are interested in the almost grotesque disparity that can lie between cause and effect, here is a subject for you. Three months earlier a tailor named Vigoureux, whose wife secretly practised magic, had entertained a few friends to dinner, amongst whom was an intimate of his wife's, named Marie Bosse. This Marie Bosse it was who drank that excessive glass of wine which, drowning prudence, led her to boast of the famous trade she drove as a fortune-teller to the nobility, and even to hint of something further.

"Another three poisonings," she chuckled, "and I shall retire with my fortune made!"

An attorney who was present

pricked up his ears, bethought him of the tales that were afloat, and gave information to the police. The police set a trap for Marie Bosse, and she betrayed herself. Later, under torture, she betrayed La Vigoureux. La Vigoureux betrayed others, and these others again.

The arrest of Marie Bosse was like knocking down the first of a row of ninepins, but none could have suspected that the last of these stood in the royal apartments.

On the day before she was to repair to St. Germain, La Voisin, betrayed in her turn, received a surprise visit from the police—who, of course, had no knowledge of the regicide their action was thwarting—and she was carried off to the Châtelet. Put to the question, she revealed a great deal; but her terror of the horrible punishment reserved for regicides prevented her to the day of her death at the stake — in February of 1680 — from saying a word of her association with Madame de Montespan.

But there were others whom she betrayed under torture, and whose arrest followed quickly upon her own, who had not her strength of character. Among these were La Filastre and the magician Lesage. When it was found that these two corroborated each other in the incredible things which they related, the Chambre Ardente took fright. La Reynie, who presided over it, laid the matter before the King, and the King, horror-stricken by the discovery of the revolting practices in which the mother of his children had been engaged, suspended the sittings of the Chambre Ardente, and commanded that no further proceedings should be taken against Lesage and La Filastre, and none initiated against Romani, Bertrand, the Abbé Guibourg, and the scores of other poisoners and magicians who had been arrested, and who were acquainted with Madame de Montespan's unholy traffic.

But it was not out of any desire to spare Madame de Montespan that the King proceeded in this manner; he was concerned only to spare himself and his royal dignity. He feared above all things the scandal and ridicule which must touch him as a result of publicity, and because he feared it so much, he could impose no punishment upon Madame de Montespan.

This he made known to her at the interview between them procured by his minister Louvois, at about the time that the sittings of the Chambre Ardente were suspended.

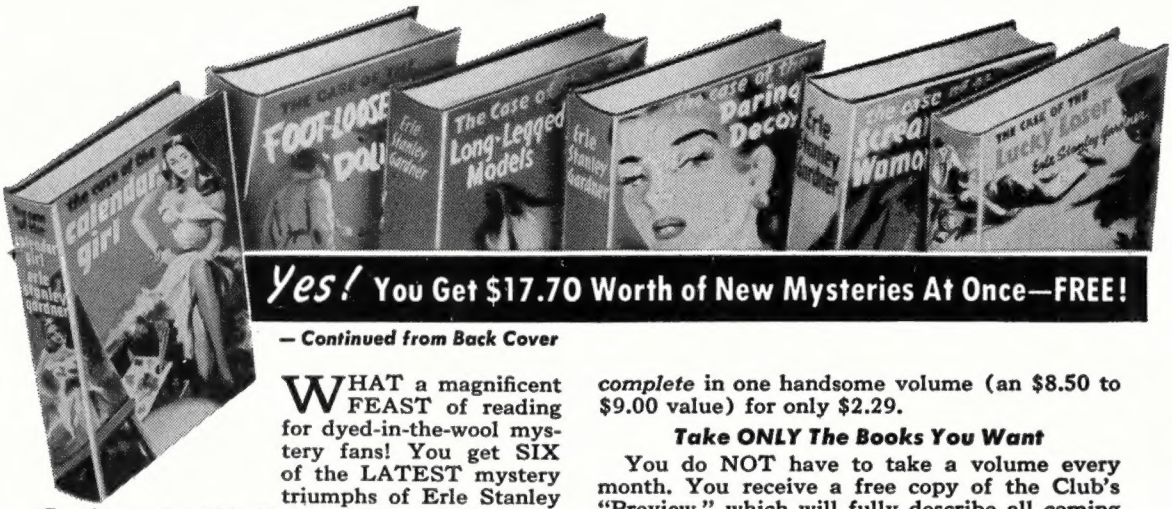
To this interview that proud, domineering woman came in dread, and in tears and humility for once. The King's bearing was cold and hard. Cold and hard were the words in which he declared the extent of his knowl-

edge of her infamy, words which revealed the loathing and disgust this knowledge brought him. If at first she was terror-stricken, crushed under the indictment, yet she was never of a temper to bear reproaches long. Under his scorn her anger kindled and her humility was sloughed.

"What then?" she cried at last, eyes aflash through lingering tears. "Is the blame all mine? If all this is true, it is no less true that I was driven to it by my love for you and the despair to which your heartlessness and infidelity reduced me. To you," she continued, gathering force at every word, "I sacrificed everything—my honour, a noble husband who loved me, all that a woman prizes. And what did you give me in exchange? Your cruel fickleness exposed me to the low mockery of the lick-spittles of your Court. Do you wonder that I went mad, and that in my madness I sacrificed what shreds of self-respect you had left me? And now it seems I have lost all but life. Take that too, if it be your pleasure. Heaven knows it has little value left for me! But remember that in striking me you strike the mother of your children—the legitimate children of France. Remember that!"

He remembered it. Indeed, he was never in danger of forgetting it; for she might have added that he would be striking also at himself and at the royal dignity which was his religion. And so that all scandalous comment might be avoided she was actually allowed to remain at Court, although no longer in her first-floor apartments; and it was not until ten years later that she departed to withdraw to the community of St. Joseph.

But even in her disgrace this woman, secretly convicted among other abominations of attempting to procure the poisoning of the King and of her rival, enjoyed an annual pension of 1,200,00 livres; whilst none dared proceed against those who shared her guilt—not even the infamous Guibourg, the poisoners Romani and Bertrand, and La Filastre—nor yet against some scores of associates of these, who were known to live by sorcery and poisonings, and who might be privy to the part played by Madame de Montespan in that horrible night of magic at the Château de Villebousin.


The Case of the Calendar Girl
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Long-Legged Models
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Lucky Loser
Erle Stanley Gardner

Yes! You Get $17.70 Worth of New Mysteries At Once—FREE!

— Continued from Back Cover

WHAT a magnificent FEAST of reading for dyed-in-the-wool mystery fans! You get SIX of the LATEST mystery triumphs of Erle Stanley Gardner, the "Undisputed King of Mystery Writers"! Each is a *full-size, full-length* book, absolutely complete. A $17.70 value — but yours FREE on this sensational offer!

Why do we make such a liberal offer? Simply to introduce you to the many advantages of membership in The Detective Book Club — the only Club that brings you the very latest NEW mysteries *at one third the usual cost!*

The Cream of the New Mysteries for LESS than 80¢ Each!

Out of the 300 or more new detective books that come out every year, the Club selects the very "cream of the crop" by top-notch authors like Erle Stanley Gardner, Agatha Christie, Manning Coles, Mignon Eberhart, Anthony Gilbert, and Leslie Ford. ALL THESE, and many *other* famous authors have had their books selected by the Club. Many are members of the Club themselves!

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them *complete* in one handsome volume (an $8.50 to $9.00 value) for only $2.29.

Take ONLY The Books You Want

You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume before or after you receive it. You need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

You Enjoy These Five Advantages

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save as much as $6 to $7 off the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean — delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

Mail Postcard for Six FREE Books

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete Perry Mason mystery thrillers described on other side, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books.

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L.I., New York

MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS

●

NO POSTAGE NEEDED

ALL SIX BOOKS FREE

SEND NO MONEY — JUST MAIL THIS CARD

65

THE DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB RG
Roslyn, L. I., New York

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular publisher's editions, the SIX new full-length Perry Mason mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $2.29 plus a few cents mailing charge as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U. S. A. only.*)

Mr.
Mrs. .....
Miss
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address .....

Zone No.
City ..... (if any) .... State .....

FREE ALL 6 OF THESE TOP Perry Mason MYSTERIES

TO NEW MEMBERS

by The World's No. 1 Mystery Writer

ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

6 Full-Size Hard-Bound Books • A $17.70 Value

Yes! You get ALL SIX of these suspense-packed Perry Mason mysteries — a $17.70 value — FREE on this amazing offer. Read simple details on other side; then rush postcard for six FREE books.

the case of the calendar girl
erle stanley gardner
THE CASE OF THE FOOT-LOOSE DOLL
Erle Stanley Gardner
The Case of the Long-Legged Models
the case of the screaming woman
THE CASE OF THE Lucky Loser
Erle Stanley Gardner
the case of the Daring Decoy
erle stanley gardner

All Six of these Exciting New Perry Mason Mysteries FREE!

1 The Case of the CALENDAR GIRL

Perry's cooked his own goose this time! He's just proven to the D.A. that Dawn Manning is a murderess—and now she wants HIM to be HER lawyer!

2 The Case of the FOOT-LOOSE DOLL

The maddest murder mix-up of Perry Mason's career — in which Perry finds himself defending a girl who may be guilty of — HER OWN MURDER!

3 The Case of the LONG-LEGGED MODELS

PERRY's client admits she has the motive for murder and a gun *with one shell missing*. She also knows *something* that could save her neck — but she WON'T admit WHAT!

4 The Case of the DARING DECOY

Perry Mason's client says he's being FRAMED on a murder charge. He insists a girl named Rosalind can clear him. But Perry finds her MURDERED.

5 The Case of the SCREAMING WOMAN

The D. A. produces a tape recording of the murdered man's last words — naming Kirby as the killer! How can Mason prove he ISN'T GUILTY?

6 The Case of the LUCKY LOSER

Everybody is convinced Perry's client is GUILTY — even the client! All Perry has to prove he's innocent is — a CORPSE that has been dead for 2 YEARS!

SEE OTHER SIDE

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

BUSINESS REPLY MAIL

First-Class Permit No. 47—Sec. 34.9—P. L. & R.—Roslyn, N.Y.

The Detective Book Club

Roslyn, L. I.

New York